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Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School

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# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**SIDELINING DEMOCRACY?: EXPLAINING THE  
UNITED STATES' RESPONSE TO THAILAND'S 2006  
AND 2014 COUPS D'ÉTAT**

by

Rugsithi Denny Meelarp

June 2016

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**SIDELINING DEMOCRACY?: EXPLAINING THE UNITED STATES'  
RESPONSE TO THAILAND'S 2006 AND 2014 COUPS D'ÉTAT**

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requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(FAR EAST, SOUTHEAST ASIA, THE PACIFIC)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

To explain the United States' relatively mild response to Thailand's 2006 and 2014 coups d'état, this research analyzed the economic, security, and diplomatic conditions that existed before and after those regime-changing events. Shifts in bilateral relations were assessed using balance of power, alliance, and democratization theories. Thailand's most recent adventures with military rule, after nearly 15 years of democracy, affected U.S.-Thai relations but not in ways democratization theory would predict. More specifically, the United States took into consideration Thailand's stability and options with China, Russia, and regional partners. Therefore, balance of power theory offered the most convincing explanation in the security realm. The United States appeared to sideline its advocacy for democratization and took measured approaches to judiciously maintain its alliance with Thailand to preserve its strategic hegemonic influence in Southeast Asia. In the long run, a strong U.S.-Thailand relationship will maintain the United States' influence in Southeast Asia to counterbalance emerging economic, security, and diplomatic threats.



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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

AECA	Arms Export Control Act
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BOI	Board of Investment
BSPP	Burmese Socialist Programme Party
CRS	Congressional Research Service
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DOD	Department of Defense
DSCA	Defense Security Cooperation Agency
EDA	excess defense articles
EU	European Union
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FDI	foreign direct investment
FMF	foreign military financing
FMS	foreign military sales
FTA	free trade agreement
FY	fiscal year
GDP	gross domestic product
GPOI	Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative
HADR	humanitarian assistance and disaster relief
HMMWV	high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles
ILEA	International Law Enforcement Academy
IMET	International Military Education Training
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INL	International Narcotics and Law
IRS	Internal Revenue Service
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
JUSMAG	Joint United States Military Advisory Group
KMT	Kuomintang or Guomindang

MARFORPAC	U.S. Marine Corps Forces Pacific
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OEC	Observatory of Economic Complexity
PDR	People's Democratic Republic
PPP	purchasing power parity
RIMPAC	Rim of the Pacific
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
TIFA	Trade and Investment Framework Agreement
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
TRT	Thai Rak Thai
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
USARPAC	U.S. Army Pacific
WWII	World War II

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. RESEARCH QUESTION

U.S. exceptionalism is grounded in the belief that the United States plays a unique and central role in spreading democracy far beyond its borders. This tenet manifests itself in the United States advocating for democracy “as a means to achieve security, stability, and prosperity for the entire world.”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, U.S. foreign policy aims to “identify and denounce regimes that deny their citizens the right to choose their leaders in elections that are free, fair, and transparent.”<sup>2</sup> These policies have seen the United States supporting the transition to democracy in 117 countries to date.<sup>3</sup> Analysts argue that democracy reduces conflict while enhancing political stability and economic prosperity.<sup>4</sup> President George W. Bush often stated that one reason for the war in Iraq was to promote democracy as a tool to combat terrorism and as a mechanism to spread democracy throughout the Middle East. Thus, one would expect a strong U.S. response to significant deviations from democracy and certainly to military coups d’état that replace democratic regimes with authoritarian ones. Yet U.S. reactions to Thailand’s democratic setbacks over the past decade have appeared surprisingly mild.<sup>5</sup>

Thailand has long been a key U.S. ally in Asia, and historically, U.S.–Thailand relations have continued to strengthen despite Thailand’s lengthy coup cycle, now standing at 19 such events since 1932. Siam and U.S. diplomatic relations began in 1832

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<sup>1</sup> “Democracy,” Access 15 December 2015, U.S. Department of State, [www.state.gov/j/drl/democ/](http://www.state.gov/j/drl/democ/).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Larry Jay Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies throughout the World*, 1st ed. (New York: Times Books/Henry Holt and Co., 2008), 12; Uwe Sunde and Matteo Cervellati, “Democratizing for Peace? The Effect of Democratization on Civil Conflicts,” *Oxford Economic Papers* 66, no. 3 (2013): 774.

<sup>5</sup> Emma Chanlett-Avery, Ben Dolven, and Wil Mackey, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2015), 3, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Committee on Foreign Affairs House of Representatives, *The Impact of Coup-Related Sanctions on Thailand and Fiji: Helpful or Harmful to U.S. Relations?*, First Session, August 1, 2007, 2.; Craig Whitlock, “U.S. Military to Participate in Major Exercise in Thailand Despite Coup,” *Washington Post*, February 7, 2015.

and were formalized by the Treaty of Amity and Commerce in 1833.<sup>6</sup> In 1954, Thailand became a U.S. treaty ally, and in 2003 President George W. Bush officially designated Thailand as a major non-NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) ally that could enhance security cooperation.<sup>7</sup> This distinction put Thailand in an exclusive club of countries that enjoy privileges to greater U.S. foreign aid and military assistance, including priority delivery of defense equipment and weapons purchases. Following the 2006 coup that removed Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra from power, the U.S. ambassador offered a relatively mild criticism, expressing disapproval for the setback in democratization while carefully articulating the goals of preserving the two countries' long-lasting relationship.<sup>8</sup> After the 2014 coup, the U.S. government's response was slightly harsher, with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry condemning the coup; however, U.S. sanctions on Thailand still allowed for significant latitude in determining how much assistance to maintain, reduce, or suspend.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the U.S.-Thailand relationship continues to be close economically, politically, and militarily.

After its 1991 coup, Thailand significantly democratized its political institutions with less direct military influence in politics, but the two recent coups have officials, politicians, analysts, investors, and civil-society leaders in both Thailand and the United States worried about a more permanent relapse to past authoritarian, military-led governance. Thailand's latest coup, in 2014, marks the country's 19th since the

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<sup>6</sup> Siam became known as Thailand on 23 June 1939.

<sup>7</sup> Emma Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2006), 14, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Catharin Dalpino, "Obama in Thailand: Charting a New Course for the Alliance?," *Asia Pacific Bulletin*, no. 188 (2012): 1–2, [www.eastwestcenter.org/sites/default/files/private/apb188\\_0.pdf](http://www.eastwestcenter.org/sites/default/files/private/apb188_0.pdf); Pavin Chachavalpongpun, "Competing Diplomacies: Thailand Amidst Sino-American Rivalry," *Southeast Asian Affairs* 2011, no. 1 (2011): 310, <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/saa/summary/v2011/2011.chachavalpongpun.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Emma Chanlett-Avery and Ben Dolven, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012), 8, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Peter Symonds, "The U.S. And Thailand's Military Coup," International Committee of the Fourth International, 26 May 2014, [www.wsws.org/en/articles/2014/05/26/pers-m26.html?view=print](http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2014/05/26/pers-m26.html?view=print).

<sup>9</sup> John Kerry, "Coups in Thailand," news release, May 22, 2014, [www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/05/226446.htm](http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/05/226446.htm); Chanlett-Avery, Dolven, and Mackey, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2015), 3, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

establishment of a constitutional monarchy in 1932. The first 17 coups, between 1932 and 1991, usually transferred power between nondemocratic governments. A long hiatus from 1991 to 2006 led most analysts to believe coups were a thing of the past; democracy was simply too robust. However, two coups and related unrest in the past decade have jeopardized Thailand's political stability. Simultaneously, as a result of "rebalancing" to Asia, the United States is more actively seeking to sustain and enhance diplomatic and military cooperation with its main allies in Southeast Asia, including Thailand. Yet many observers consider the U.S. response to Thailand's 2006 and 2014 coups as overly mild.<sup>10</sup>

This thesis explored the ways that Thailand's two most recent coups d'état affected U.S.-Thai relations. Specifically, it sought to explain why the United States did not exert more economic, security, or diplomatic pressure on its long-term ally to return to democracy. It appears that the United States has been more concerned with enforcing a favorable balance of power with respect to China and to a lesser degree with Russia, and on maintaining the U.S.-Thailand alliance, regardless of Thailand's regime type.

## **B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

As China becomes a major power and with China showing few signs of democratization despite its economic liberalization since the 1980s, the United States will need allies in the region more than ever, particularly Thailand. Since World War II (WWII), the United States has, in general, supported the advancement of security, development, and democracy on a global level.<sup>11</sup> This is true in Asia as well, especially, but not only, in the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia, Myanmar, Japan, South Korea, India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. President Barack Obama recently stated that "Asia will largely define whether the century ahead will be marked by conflict or

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<sup>10</sup> Chanlett-Avery, Dolven, and Mackey, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2015), 3, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; House of Representatives, *Impact of Coup-Related Sanctions*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Barack Obama, "National Security Strategy," in *The White House* (2015). [www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015\\_national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf).

cooperation, needless suffering or human progress.”<sup>12</sup> This statement, which was intended for all of the Asia-Pacific region, resonates with Thailand. Thailand is the only country in mainland Southeast Asia with a relatively long history of democratization; a formal alliance with the United States; and common interests, economic ties, and military cooperation with the United States. Thailand’s status with the U.S. government continues to improve overall, but the direction the relationship takes will depend, in part, on how the U.S. government responds to Thailand’s two most recent coups and any others in the near to mid-future.

Maintaining a solid U.S.-Thailand relationship is vital to U.S. national security strategies in the region, and understanding factors that impact this bond is critical for the relationship to flourish. The U.S.-Thailand relationship is symbiotic, and both sides have repeatedly expressed desires to maintain and enhance cooperation. While it appears that the 2006 and 2014 coups strained the U.S.-Thailand relationship, the United States remains staunchly committed to its treaty ally; however, it must also maneuver within the confines of the law.<sup>13</sup> The U.S. president is required by law to impose Section 508 of the U.S. Foreign Operations Appropriations Act on foreign governments disposed by a military coup, and this act can only be lifted after “presidential certification to Congress that a democratically elected government had taken office in Thailand before U.S. assistance ...[can] be resumed.”<sup>14</sup> Constrained by legislation, the U.S. government temporarily suspended military aid following each coup. After the Thai election in December 2007, the U.S. government reinstated military funding.<sup>15</sup> At the time of this thesis, elections have been postponed until a new Thai constitution is approved, and military aid has not resumed. However, the Obama administration, exercising discretion

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<sup>12</sup> “Fact Sheet: The Fiscal Year 2014 Federal Budget and the Asia-Pacific,” news release, 2013, [www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/asia\\_pacific\\_rebalance\\_factsheet\\_20130412.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/asia_pacific_rebalance_factsheet_20130412.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Obama, “National Security Strategy,” in *The White House*, (2015), 24.

<sup>14</sup> House of Representatives, *Impact of Coup-Related Sanctions*, 1; Lewis M. Stern, “Diverging Roads 21st-Century U.S.-Thai Defense Relations,” *Strategic Forum*, no. 241 (June 2009): 3, [www.purl.fdlp.gov/GPO/gpo8810](http://www.purl.fdlp.gov/GPO/gpo8810).

<sup>15</sup> Emma Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2010), 2, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

and setting aside political objections to the 2014 coup, has decided to continue the annual U.S.-Thailand-led multinational military exercise, Cobra Gold.<sup>16</sup>

Thailand's recent coups exposed flaws in U.S. foreign policies and regulations that need to be reevaluated to give U.S. leaders more flexibility. For example, sanction laws require universal application and thus do not account for the domestic stability of a given country. A deeper examination of the U.S. diplomatic rhetoric versus its responses to Thailand's coups reveals the true nature of the relationship, which is a shared common interest in stability more than in democracy. A one-size-fits-all ideologically driven policy response may not work to maintain the U.S. relationship with Thailand, especially given China's growing influence.

Thailand is not without options and has skillfully adapted foreign policy to take advantage of its relationship with great powers. Thailand has survived in a region plagued by a history of conflict and colonialism. Previously known as Siam, Thailand skillfully and diplomatically managed to avoid colonialism by Western powers in the 1800s and 1900s, even signing a mutual defense pact with Japan during WWII to avoid being colonized by the Empire. Thailand considers the political conflict that led to the 2006 and 2014 coups an internal problem that requires a Thai solution and will ask for foreign assistance only if needed. Despite significant democratization since 1991, Thailand continues to rely on royal and military intervention as a stabilizing force against extreme political corruption and unrest.

A strong U.S. government pushback to the coups can result in Thailand pursuing an already well-established Sino-Thai relationship.<sup>17</sup> For example, "after the legally mandated suspension of \$24 million in U.S. military assistance precipitated by Thailand's 2006 coup, the Chinese provided \$49 million in military assistance."<sup>18</sup> Thailand has proven itself flexible and has pursued a multitude of relationships with other states. Not relying on a sole international partnership benefits Thailand, but may also help other

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<sup>16</sup> Whitlock, "U.S. Military to Participate in Major Exercise in Thailand Despite Coup."

<sup>17</sup> Sasiwan Chingchit, "After Obama's Visit: The U.S.-Thailand Alliance and China," *Asia Pacific Bulletin*, no. 189 (4 December 2012); 1–2.

<sup>18</sup> Walter Lohman, "Reinvigorating the U.S.-Thailand Alliance," *Backgrounder* 2609 (26 September 2011): 4, [www.heritage.org/research/reports/2011/09/reinvigorating-the-u-s-thailand-alliance](http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2011/09/reinvigorating-the-u-s-thailand-alliance).

countries in the region: “The fact that Thailand cultivates friendly relations with both the United States and China could facilitate improved relations between the two powers in Asia and help other Southeast Asian states to avoid having to make sharp choices.”<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, a weaker U.S.-Thailand relationship could also strengthen China’s hand.

Several theories may help explain the U.S.-Thailand relationship, nuances surrounding Thailand’s recent coups, and the weak U.S. response to those coups. Given the complex dynamics of the situation, questions remain unanswered both on a theoretical and practical levels. Theoretically, realists believe the international system exists in a natural state of anarchy, while liberals believe anarchy is best managed through international relations and foreign policies. International relations often create security dilemmas, and a state must take action and enact measures for survival. Forming alliances, establishing a balance of power, and spreading common political ideologies are methods often used to dampen the anarchic nature of the international system. In practice, alliances are built and sustained by mutual interest and shared ideology. Which of these two are more important for alliance cohesion is still unclear.

Thailand is strongly tied to the United States in terms of its economy, diplomacy, and security; however, since the end of the Cold War, Thailand has increased trade, cooperation, and weapons purchases with China. Thailand, as a middle power, may have the options of a swing state, playing China and the United States off each other. Is the U.S. policy on democratization the top priority, or are other factors, such as regional and internal stability, economic growth, and balance of power, more important to U.S. national interests? Understanding why each state acts the way it does can help U.S. decision makers respond more effectively to key issues that may have negative implications for this critical alliance and for regional stability.

## **C. BACKGROUND**

Thailand is a long-time U.S. ally and a strategic partner in the region. Thailand officially became a treaty ally after signing the 1954 Manila Pact of the former Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the 1962 Thanat-Rusk communiqué. The Cold

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<sup>19</sup> Chingchit, “After Obama’s Visit.”

War only served to deepen cooperation on all levels. In 2003, Thailand was designated a “major non-NATO ally” by President Bush.<sup>20</sup> The military-to-military relationship is the foundation of the U.S.-Thailand alliance; Thailand allows U.S. access to Thai military facilities, airfields, and ports during both war and peace.<sup>21</sup> The relationship became even stronger after the signing of the 2012 Joint Vision Statement for the Thai-U.S. Defense Alliance.<sup>22</sup> The Department of Defense (DOD) initiative to realign the U.S. military with an emphasis on the “places, not bases” concept in Southeast Asia made security cooperation with Thailand even more strategically important.<sup>23</sup> Thailand offers a gateway to Asia; the United States provides economic opportunities, security, and military assistance.<sup>24</sup> The overall perception is that both states value the alliance, and the U.S.-Thailand relationship continues to flourish despite repeated coups. Each state’s national security interests appear to be the driving force that bonds the U.S.-Thailand relationship.

Thailand had a long history of coups, a “pattern of governance [that] became known as the ‘vicious cycle of Thai politics.’”<sup>25</sup> Analysts and officials came to believe that coups were the only way to resolve political stalemates. But in the 1990s, this steady

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<sup>20</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2006), 8, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Emma Chanlett-Avery and Ben Dolven, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), 3, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Dalpino, “Obama in Thailand”; Chachavalpongpun, “Competing Diplomacies,” 310.

<sup>21</sup> Chanlett-Avery and Dolven, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), 3, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Paul Chambers, “U.S.-Thai Relations after 9/11: A New Era in Cooperation?,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 26, no. 3 (December 2004): 460–68 [https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/contemporary\\_southeast\\_asia\\_a\\_journal\\_of\\_international\\_and\\_strategic\\_affairs/v026/26.3.chambers.html](https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/contemporary_southeast_asia_a_journal_of_international_and_strategic_affairs/v026/26.3.chambers.html); Paul Chambers, “Military ‘Shadows’ in Thailand since the 2006 Coup,” *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 40, no. 2 (24 May 2013): 67–82, DOI: 10.1080/00927678.2013.788413.

<sup>22</sup> David J. Berteau, Michael J. Green, and Zack Cooper, “Assessing the Asia-Pacific Rebalance,” Center for Strategic & International Studies/Rowman & Littlefield, December 2014, <http://csis.org/publication/assessing-asia-pacific-rebalance>.

<sup>23</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2006), 8, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Saiyud Kerdphol, “Thai-American Friendship: Implications for U.S. Policy in Southeast Asia,” in *Through Asian Eyes: U.S. Policy in the Asian Century*, ed. Sol W. Sanders (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001), 165–73.

<sup>25</sup> Miron Mushkat, “Policy Implications of Thailand’s Unexpected Coup,” *International Studies* 29, no. 2 (1992): 159.



pattern changed as strides were made to reduce the military's influence on politics and form and strengthen democratic institutions.<sup>26</sup> The year 1991 purportedly brought the last nondemocratic transfer of power, followed by 15 years of the government changing hands via elections instead of coups.<sup>27</sup> Thailand's military claimed the 1998–91 government was corrupt and staged a military coup that led to political liberalization, but only after violent social unrest and royal intervention. Demonstrators fought the military, and soldiers fired back at the crowd; this violent clash became known as the Black May of 1992. King Bhumibol Adulyadej intervened in a nationally televised broadcast, calling both sides to face each other and compromise, with the nation's best interests as their guiding priority.<sup>28</sup> The U.S. government responded immediately following Black May by withdrawing troops from the joint U.S.-Thai military exercise and by suspending economic and military assistance, but it continued counternarcotics assistance and foreign military sales.<sup>29</sup> In the aftermath, the People's Constitution of 1997 emerged with new provisions for an independent media and significant changes in the parliament party list system that former police officer Thaksin Shinawatra would leverage in his rise to power.<sup>30</sup> Ironically, "the 1997 Constitution unintentionally provided the basis for Thaksin's monopolization of power and for a subsequent military response [in 2006],"<sup>31</sup> but for the time being, Thailand appeared to have broken out of the coup cycle.

Thaksin Shinawatra's meteoric rise met a sudden end in 2006. His rise to power had begun after he leveraged the Asian financial crisis in 1997 and advanced his family business, Shin Corporation, to become the largest company in Thailand. Prior to the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.; Nicholas Farrelly, "Why Democracy Struggles: Thailand's Elite Coup Culture," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 67, no. 3 (2013): 283–88.

<sup>27</sup> Thitinan Pongsudhirak, "Thailand since the Coup," *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 4 (2008): 140.

<sup>28</sup> Duncan McCargo, "Thailand Protests May Prove Royal Words Are No Longer Enough," (17 May 2010), [www.theguardian.com/world/2010/may/17/analysis-thai-king-redshirt-protest](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/may/17/analysis-thai-king-redshirt-protest).

<sup>29</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Human Rights Watch World Report 1993: Thailand," 2 September 2015 [www.hrw.org/reports/1993/WR93/Asw-11.htm#P397\\_166328](http://www.hrw.org/reports/1993/WR93/Asw-11.htm#P397_166328).

<sup>30</sup> Erik Martinez Kuhonta, "The Paradox of Thailand's 1997 'People's Constitution': Be Careful What You Wish For," *Asian Survey* 48, no. 3 (2008): 374; Björn Dressel, "Thailand's Elusive Quest for a Workable Constitution, 1997–2007," *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 31, no. 2 (2009) 296–325; John Pike, "Thailand—1997 'The People's Constitution,'" [GlobalSecurity.org](http://GlobalSecurity.org), 30 August 2015, [www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/thailand/constitution-1997.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/thailand/constitution-1997.htm).

<sup>31</sup> Kuhonta, "The Paradox of Thailand's 1997," 375.

deflation of the Thai *baht* on 2 July 1997, Shin Corporation repaid the majority of its foreign debts, which caused critics to believe that Thaksin was tipped off from his sources within the Finance Ministry.<sup>32</sup> In 2001, Thaksin became the first prime minister to complete a full term of office while concentrating political power under his Thai Rak Thai (TRT) Party, manifested as the Red Shirts in populist, protest-based political battles.

The military coup that ousted Thaksin in 2006 was believed necessary and was welcomed by the urban middle class and the royalists. Thaksin's opposition, the People's Alliance for Democracy, known as the Yellow Shirts, viewed Thaksin as a dictator.<sup>33</sup> In addition to having secured a near-monopoly on Thai media, Thaksin had cemented his political influence by appointing family members to key positions within the government, military, and police. Conservative elites feared his power, and the growing middle class opposed his corrupt and autocratic rule.<sup>34</sup> Director of research and lecturer at the Institute of South East Asian Affairs at Chiang Mai University, Paul Chambers, concluded, "the only actors with sufficient political influence to effectively oppose Thaksin were the palace, the Privy Council, and certain senior military officials."<sup>35</sup>

After the 2006 coup and much public demand for royal intervention, the monarch urged the judiciary to resolve the deepening political crisis. As a result, the courts annulled elections, abolished primarily Thaksin-aligned political parties, and banned TRT politicians from office for five years.<sup>36</sup> In response to foreign concerns, during a press conference minister of defense General Winai Phattiyakul explained to international reporters that "the coup was the only way to retain democracy in Thailand"<sup>37</sup> and

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<sup>32</sup> Duncan. McCargo, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, ed. Patthamānan (Copenhagen: NIAS, 2005), 42.

<sup>33</sup> International Crisis Group, "Bridging Thailand's Deep Divide," (5 July 2010): 12, [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/thailand/192\\_Bridging%20Thailands%20Deep%20Divide.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/thailand/192_Bridging%20Thailands%20Deep%20Divide.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Chambers, "Military 'Shadows,'" 72

<sup>36</sup> McCargo, "Thailand Protests May Prove Royal Words Are No Longer Enough."

<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Woodier, "The Rise and Fall of the Media Dictator: Thailand and the Continued Influence of the Military in Southeast Asia," in *The Media and Political Change in Southeast Asia: Karaoke Culture and the Evolution of Personality Politics* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2008), 212.

emphasized that the coup was popular with the Thai people. Similar claims were made after the 2014 coup.

The U.S. government is legally restricted in how it can respond to coups, but the president may exercise some discretion. U.S. officials somewhat gently condemned Thailand's 2006 coup and suspended about \$4.7 million in military aid, but Cobra Gold and aid to nonmilitary recipients continued.<sup>38</sup> U.S. response to the 2014 coup was similarly weak. In light of extensive U.S. efforts to establish democracies in Iraq and Afghanistan, among other places, in the 2000s and 2010s, the apparent hypocrisy of the U.S. response to Thailand's democratic reversals has left many questioning the foundation of the U.S.-Thailand relationship.<sup>39</sup>

#### **D. LITERATURE REVIEW**

An abundance of literature covers the history of the U.S.-Thailand relationship dating back to when the partnership began in 1832 and was formalized by the Treaty of Amity and Commerce in 1833. The literature delineates the relationship's progression over time, culminating in Thailand's elevated status as a non-NATO ally in 2003.<sup>40</sup> Government agencies, nongovernmental agencies, scholarly works, and policy documents provide empirical evidence and tangible data for the strong and enduring economic, diplomatic, and security relationship between the states. The literature outlines policies and laws, which mandate certain U.S. reactions to coups. Major explanations for

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<sup>38</sup> John Pike, "Cobra Gold," (22 August 2015), [www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/cobra-gold.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/cobra-gold.htm); Richard S. Ehrlich, "Obama Scales Down Annual Cobra Gold Military Exercises in Protests Thailand Coup," (9 February 2015), [www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/feb/9/obama-protests-thailand-coup-scales-down-annual-co/print/](http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/feb/9/obama-protests-thailand-coup-scales-down-annual-co/print/); Prashanth Parameswaran, "U.S.-Thailand Relations and Cobra Gold 2015: What's Really Going On?," *Diplomat* (5 February 2015), [www.thediplomat.com/2015/02/u-s-thailand-relations-and-cobra-gold-2015-whats-really-going-on/?allpages=yes&print=yes](http://www.thediplomat.com/2015/02/u-s-thailand-relations-and-cobra-gold-2015-whats-really-going-on/?allpages=yes&print=yes); Whitlock, "U.S. Military to Participate in Major Exercise in Thailand Despite Coup."

<sup>39</sup> NOW/26, "Direction of Thai-U.S. Relations," (2015).; Daniel R. Russel, "Remarks at the Institute of Security and International Studies," news release, January 26, 2015, [www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2015/01/236308.htm](http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2015/01/236308.htm); Parameswaran, "U.S.-Thailand Relations and Cobra Gold 2015?," <http://thediplomat.com/2015/02/u-s-thailand-relations-and-cobra-gold-2015-whats-really-going-on/?allpages=yes&print=yes>.

<sup>40</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2006), 14, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Dalpino, "Obama in Thailand"; Chachavalpongpan, "Competing Diplomacies," 310.

U.S.-Thailand interactions revolve around balance of power theory, alliance theory, and democracy-related theories.

## **1. Balance of Power Theory**

Balance of power theory may be applicable to the U.S.-Thailand relationship, given that both states are trying to prevent an asymmetrical power distribution that favors China. This theory is instrumental in explaining foreign policies that are aimed at state self-preservation. States collectively pool resources such as people, geography, and weapons with other states to balance against a greater threat. The rise of China threatens the existing global balance of power. Analysts believe that the recent U.S. rebalance to Asia is really a balance against China. Some suggest that Thailand is a critical ally of the United States in this effort. Thailand's geographical location, economy, and most importantly, its strong ties to both the United States and China make Thailand an important ally for the U.S. government.<sup>41</sup> Thailand's national security strategy involves not only alliances with great powers but also securing free trade agreements (FTAs) with major economies: Japan, China, Australia, and India. While the United States disapproves of Thailand's coup, China maintains close relations and provides assistance to Thailand. For example, in 2011, Thailand experienced the worst flooding in half a century, especially its highly productive central region, devastating Thailand's economy. China immediately sent \$16 million in assistance, which was 17 times more than the U.S. relief package.<sup>42</sup>

Balance of power theory explains why the U.S. government exercises discretion in maintaining and enhancing bilateral relations. The U.S.-Thailand relationship was further strengthened post-9/11, leading to an elevated partnership status with Thailand named as a major non-NATO ally.<sup>43</sup> Thailand earned this status through its steadfast participation during the Korean War, Vietnam War, Cold War, Persian Gulf Wars, and

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<sup>41</sup> Catharin Dalpino, "The U.S.-Thailand Alliance: Continuity and Change in the 21st Century," December 2014, [www.nbr.org/publications/element.aspx?id=779](http://www.nbr.org/publications/element.aspx?id=779).

<sup>42</sup> Chingchit, "After Obama's Visit." 4 December 2012.

<sup>43</sup> Chambers, "U.S.-Thai Relations after 9/11"; Chanlett-Avery and Dolven, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012), 8, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

the global war on terrorism. Thailand sent troops during the Korean War and Vietnam War, and its troops suffered alongside U.S. troops. During the Vietnam War, Thailand allowed the United States to operate air campaigns to Vietnam, Cambodia, and the Lao PDR from Thailand. During the Cold War, Thailand was the key anti-Communist ally in Southeast Asia. More recently, access to Thai ports and airfields has allowed a strategic flow of troops and equipment to the Middle East and South Asia for Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation Enduring Freedom. The U.S. government maintains a diplomatic and military partnership that continues to solidify despite setbacks in Thailand's democratization process, suggesting that the U.S. government values having a reliable, stable ally over a democratic one.

## **2. Alliance Theory**

States respond to threats by forming alliances to counter a common threat or by bandwagoning with the threat.<sup>44</sup> Stephen M. Walt defines alliance as a “formal or informal relationship of security cooperation between two or more sovereign states.”<sup>45</sup> This definition is a quid pro quo in that each party gives something toward the relationship in exchange for compensation.<sup>46</sup> Thailand successfully executed both alliance formation and bandwagoning to avoid Western colonialism, Japanese occupation, and communist expansion and continues this foreign policy model today. In the process, Thailand ceded territorial rights, forged alliances with great powers, and played alliances with great powers for its survival.

Alliance theory makes practical sense, resonating with both states' national security interests. The U.S.-Thailand alliance started with the 1954 Manila Pact of SEATO and the Thanat-Rusk communiqué of 1962.<sup>47</sup> Thailand was a developing state that benefited from the great-power protection of the United States, leading many to

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<sup>44</sup> Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>46</sup> Chachavalpongpun, “Competing Diplomacies.”

<sup>47</sup> Chanlett-Avery and Dolven, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012), 11, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Relations with Thailand,” 6 November 2015, [www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2814.htm](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2814.htm).; Stern, “Diverging Roads”; Thitinan Pongsudhirak, “Thailand-United States Relations after 175 Years: Challenges and Prospects,” (13 October 2008): 2.

equate the U.S.-Thailand relationship as a *phi noong* or older-younger brother relationship.<sup>48</sup> For Thailand, having a great-power ally proved useful in warding off enemies. The U.S.-Thailand alliance has been significantly shaped by the Cold War, most notably the threat of communism from its northern neighbor, China; its eastern neighbors, Vietnam, Cambodia, and the Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR); and an internal insurgency.

During the Cold War, the U.S. government provided financial and military assistance to Thailand. In return, Thailand became a key anti-Communist state in the region with the support of the United States.<sup>49</sup> Security cooperation and economic aid during the Vietnam War deepened the relationship and turned Thailand into an indispensable ally. Thailand contributed troops and “hosted a massive U.S. presence based on U.S.-built airfields, an important deep-water port at Sattahip, and a military communications infrastructure that became a critical support and logistics base for conducting the war in Indochina.”<sup>50</sup> U.S. interest in Southeast Asia was high, and in return Thailand's military received U.S. military training under the International Military Education Training (IMET), as well as weapons and equipment through the foreign military sales (FMS) program.<sup>51</sup>

The U.S. government's decision to end the Vietnam War in the early 1970s left Thai officials feeling deserted and vulnerable; in response, Thailand immediately limited U.S. military access to airfields and ports.<sup>52</sup> From Thailand's perspective, its major ally and big brother abandoned them.<sup>53</sup> As a result, Thailand normalized relations with China, and currently the Sino-Thai relationship remains strong, giving Thailand solid alliance

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<sup>48</sup> Marjorie Muecke, “Trends toward the Democratization of Thai Society,” in *Thailand-U.S. Relations: Changing Political, Strategic, and Economic Factors*, ed. Ansil Ramsay and Wiwat Mungkandi (University of California Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1988), 62.

<sup>49</sup> Chachavalpongpun, “Competing Diplomacies,” 310; Indonesia was also a critical anti-Communist state with U.S. backing during the Cold War.

<sup>50</sup> Stern, “Diverging Roads,” 1.

<sup>51</sup> Emma Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2005), 8, <https://www.fas.org/sfp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Kerdphol, “Thai-American Friendship,” 167–68.

<sup>52</sup> Kerdphol, “Thai-American Friendship,” 168; Stern, “Diverging Roads,” 1–2.

<sup>53</sup> Kerdphol, “Thai-American Friendship,” 168.

options.<sup>54</sup> The U.S.-Thailand relationship rekindled in 1978 when Vietnam invaded Cambodia, Thailand's immediate neighbor. Throughout these decades of violent, political conflict, the United States invested heavily in modernizing and equipping the Royal Thai Military.<sup>55</sup> In 1982, Cobra Gold commenced and, despite occasional postponements and scale-downs in size, the exercise continues uninterrupted and robust.<sup>56</sup>

Major events in the 1990s brought more challenges. In 1991, these included the Persian Gulf War, the end of the Cold War, and Thailand's 17th coup since 1932. Legislatively mandated reactions tested the U.S.-Thailand relationship. The Asian financial crisis of 1997 would challenge alliance theory and the U.S. commitment to aid its ally during a time of need. This crisis stemmed from the Thai government's decision to keep the Thai baht inflated during an overheated real estate bubble; international investment speculators attacked the Thai baht, leading to a contagion effect that severely impacted the global economy. Many Thais considered the U.S. response to the financial crisis as too little, too late and as focused primarily on U.S. investors.<sup>57</sup> Thailand reached out for economic assistance prior to the crisis, but the Clinton administration refrained from intervening.<sup>58</sup> Once again, Thailand felt let down by the United States.<sup>59</sup> In contrast, China refused to devalue its currency, and Thailand turned to financial support with stringent terms from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).<sup>60</sup> The aftermath of the Asian financial crisis left many Thais skeptical of the U.S. commitment.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2006), 14, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

<sup>55</sup> Stern, "Diverging Roads," 2.

<sup>56</sup> Chachavalpongpun, "Competing Diplomacies,"; Scot Marciel, *Thailand: A Democracy at Risk*, June 24, 2014, [www.bangkok.usembassy.gov/062414\\_scot\\_marciel\\_testimony.html](http://www.bangkok.usembassy.gov/062414_scot_marciel_testimony.html); Parameswaran, "U.S.-Thailand Relations and Cobra Gold 2015" 5 February 2015, [www.thediplomat.com/2015/02/u-s-thailand-relations-and-cobra-gold-2015-whats-really-going-on/?allpages=yes&print=yes](http://www.thediplomat.com/2015/02/u-s-thailand-relations-and-cobra-gold-2015-whats-really-going-on/?allpages=yes&print=yes); Ehrlich, "Obama Scales Down Annual Cobra Gold Military Exercises."

<sup>57</sup> Chambers, "U.S.-Thai Relations after 9/11"; Stern, "Diverging Roads," 6.

<sup>58</sup> Stern, "Diverging Roads," 3.

<sup>59</sup> Pongsudhirak, "Thailand-United States Relations after 175 Years," 4.

<sup>60</sup> Chingchit, "After Obama's Visit," 1–2.

<sup>61</sup> Chanlett-Avery and Dolven, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012), 1, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Pongsudhirak, "Thailand-United States Relations after 175 Years," 3–4.; Chingchit, "After Obama's Visit," 1–2.

### 3. Democratization and Democratic Peace Theories

The United States advocates for democracy as a means to promote peace and stability, but sometimes those three concepts are incompatible. Democratization theory holds that democracies tend to avoid going to war with other democracies, respect human rights, and prefer peaceful resolutions.<sup>62</sup> A military coup is considered a step backward from democracy. The weak U.S. response to the 2006 and 2014 coups might have applied calculated pressure on Thailand to return quickly to democracy without severing the relationship. Yet, a Western model of democracy may not be the best fit for Thailand. In response to Thailand's coups, the U.S. government suspended bilateral assistance programs, but it continues to provide assistance for "democracy promotion, disaster assistance, counterterrorism, counternarcotic, trafficking in persons, and refugee assistance programs."<sup>63</sup> Believing that major non-NATO ally status should be reserved for democracies, Congress introduced the Thailand Democracy Act that proposed removing Thailand's preferred status.<sup>64</sup> The president did not ratify the act after the 2006 coup, and it is unlikely the current administration will revoke Thailand's status in light of the subsequent coup. Instead, President Obama decided to continue with Cobra Gold in 2015 and 2016, sending the message that while the United States advocates for democracy, it values security cooperation and stability more.<sup>65</sup>

Thaksin used the crisis to rally popular support from the rural poor and consolidate political power in parliament. Prior to the 2006 coup, Thailand was recovering from the Asian financial crisis of 1997, and it adopted a new constitution as a result of the 1991 coup and Black May violence. The new constitution was an attempt to end serious corruption and the coup cycle. According to Thai scholar Thitinan Pongsudhirak, "The 1997 Constitution was designed to promote transparency and accountability of the political system and the stability and effectiveness of the

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<sup>62</sup> Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy*, 12.

<sup>63</sup> House of Representatives, Impact of Coup-Related Sanctions, 19.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 27.; Ehrlich, "Obama Scales Down Annual Cobra Gold Military Exercises in Protests Thailand Coup"; Parameswaran, "U.S.-Thailand Relations and Cobra Gold 2015"; Erik Salvin, "Cobra Gold Planning Postponed; No Decision Made on U.S. Participation," *Stars and Stripes*, 16 April 2015, [www.stripes.com/news/cobra-gold-planning-postponed-no-decision-made-on-us-participation-1.340452](http://www.stripes.com/news/cobra-gold-planning-postponed-no-decision-made-on-us-participation-1.340452).



government.”<sup>66</sup> Instead, the new political rules cultivated Thaksin’s rise to and consolidation of power. First, Thaksin won over the rural poor through populist policies: income redistribution, government activism, and policy innovation. Since the 1997 Asian financial crisis, Thailand’s economy rebounded in remarkable fashion, and it repaid the IMF rescue debt four years ahead of schedule. Thaksin led the TRT Party with the aim to rally those hit hard by the financial crisis: “Thaksinomics combined the venerable East Asian export model’s emphasis on mass manufacturing spearheaded by foreign direct investment with initiatives to stimulate smaller business that leveraged indigenous skills and resources.”<sup>67</sup> Thailand’s economy continues to grow by expanding foreign direct investment (FDI) from Japan, China, and South Korea.<sup>68</sup>

Thailand now has a solid economy and exhibits significant regional influence. In 2013, the United States was Thailand’s number one export market; in turn, Thailand became the United States’ 24th largest trading partner, totaling \$38 billion in bilateral trades.<sup>69</sup> Thailand, a key founder of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), is considered by many analysts to be a buffer state between China and the United States.<sup>70</sup> Thailand expressed interest in joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and initiated negotiations for an FTA with the United States. A strong U.S.-Thai partnership could hedge against China’s growing influence in the region.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Pongsudhirak, “Thailand since the Coup.”

<sup>67</sup> Robert Looney, “Thaksinomics Revisited,” *The Milken Institute Review*, (2008), [www.hdl.handle.net/10945/40672](http://www.hdl.handle.net/10945/40672).

<sup>68</sup> Duncan McCargo, “Thailand in 2014: The Trouble with Magic Swords,” *Southeast Asian Affairs* 2015, no. 1 (2015): 349, [www.muse.jhu.edu/journals/southeast\\_asian\\_affairs/v2015/2015.mccargo.html](http://www.muse.jhu.edu/journals/southeast_asian_affairs/v2015/2015.mccargo.html); Chanlett-Avery and Dolven, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), 10, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.; Chambers, “U.S.-Thai Relations after 9/11.”

<sup>70</sup> Chanlett-Avery and Dolven, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), 3, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Association of Southeast Asian Nations, [www.asean.org/asean/about-asean/overview](http://www.asean.org/asean/about-asean/overview).

<sup>71</sup> Chanlett-Avery and Dolven, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), 3, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Chambers, “U.S.-Thai Relations after 9/11,”

Thailand rebounded from the Asian financial crisis to become a key player and influence in the region, but its reputation has been tarnished by internal political instability. This instability resulted in the 2006 and 2014 coups and has complicated and strained U.S.-Thailand relations. Some U.S. government officials believe the September 2006 coup was a necessary evil strongly supported by key sectors of Thai society; as a result, the U.S. State Department exercised leniency while imposing sanctions.<sup>72</sup> Donald A. Manzullo, a State of Illinois representative in Congress, prepared a statement for a hearing on the impact of coup-related sanctions on Thailand: “The implementation of Section 508 sanctions on military cooperation with Thailand is truly unfortunate because of the closeness of the United States-Thai relationship. However, despite the strong ties that bind our nations, we must send a clear signal that the U.S. opposes the use of military force to overthrow a democratically elected government.”<sup>73</sup> Some U.S. government officials believe that the inconsistent policy needs to be reevaluated.

Levels of cooperation had recovered significantly before the 2014 coup. Following the 2014 coup, the U.S. response was harsher than it had been in 2006. The United States responded by suspending aid targeted primarily at military assistance and exercises, totaling an estimated \$10.5 million.<sup>74</sup> Secretary of State John Kerry urged Thailand to return immediately to democracy, noted negative implications for assistance, and emphasized the value of the military relationship.<sup>75</sup> The U.S. government response to Thailand’s coups remains a consistent disapproval, offering Bangkok leaders assistance to help reestablish democracy and continued military cooperation if not financial aid.

China has come through for Thailand during times of crisis. During the Asian financial crisis of 1997, China refused to devalue its currency and offered financial support. Thai public opinion matters and, although U.S.-Thailand relations solidified

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<sup>72</sup> House of Representatives, Impact of Coup-Related Sanctions, 2.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>74</sup> Chanlett-Avery and Dolven, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), 10, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

<sup>75</sup> Kerry, “Coup in Thailand”; Chanlett-Avery and Dolven, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), 10, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

during the Cold War and further bolstered post-9/11, Thailand also has strong traditional, economical, and political ties with China. Thailand is considered a potential battleground for great-power influence and a key mediator in the region for stability.<sup>76</sup> For instance, following President Barack Obama's visit to Thailand in 2012, anti-Thaksin Thai media expressed concerns that the U.S. rebalance toward Asia could hinder Sino-Thailand relations and cause instability in the region.<sup>77</sup>

The U.S. government has walked a fine line in dealing with Thailand's democratic setbacks over the years. In 1982, Cobra Gold began as a bilateral exercise between the American and Thai militaries, subsequently growing into the largest annual Asia-Pacific multinational military exercise.<sup>78</sup> The U.S. government's suspension of Cobra Gold following the 1992 Black May seemed to signal U.S. support by turning a political blind eye.<sup>79</sup> While certain aid was immediately suspended to Thailand following the 2006 coup, the U.S. government maintained military support, exercises, and training under the IMET program without interruption.<sup>80</sup> In 2015, Cobra Gold recorded participation from 30 countries but was scaled down in response to the 2014 coup. The message was clear that the United States disapproves of the coup but desires to preserve the U.S.-Thailand relationship as a key link in its rebalancing to Asia.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The United States has a strong security, economic, and political interest in the Southeast Asia region and considers Thailand a critical ally. Balance of power theory, and to a less but still significant extent alliance theory, best explained the U.S. reaction to Thailand's most recent coups. Democratization theory, on the other hand, did not appear significant, at least in the short-term. While Thais value the relationship and alliance,

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<sup>76</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2006), <https://www.fas.org/sfp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

<sup>77</sup> Chingchit, "After Obama's Visit."

<sup>78</sup> Chambers, "U.S.-Thai Relations after 9/11."

<sup>79</sup> Exercise Cobra Gold occurred in 1992 prior to Black May, and although the U.S. government announced the exercise suspension, Cobra Gold took place in 1993. *Ibid.*, 461–62.

<sup>80</sup> Chanlett-Avery and Dolven, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), 10, <https://www.fas.org/sfp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Chambers, "U.S.-Thai Relations after 9/11"; Chambers, "Military 'Shadows.'"

Thailand considers its political conflict an internal matter that can only be solved by a Thai solution and without foreign interference. Thailand has long demonstrated a flexible survival characteristic that has helped it resist colonialism and communism. Thailand has shown it will exercise other alliance and balance of power options when U.S. rhetoric and commitment waivers. The multi-aligned foreign policy approach and strong ties with both the United States and China could allow Thailand to facilitate relations between the great powers and maintain stability in the region that is consistent with the U.S. strategic plan to rebalance to Asia.<sup>81</sup>

Coups disrupt democracy, but in the case of Thailand, coups serve a purpose of maintaining stability within the state. While the United States prefers liberal democracy in its allies, it recognizes that stability is in both the U.S. and Thailand's interest. Thailand may be "addicted" to coups, relying on extra-constitutional royal or military intervention to dampen political conflict.<sup>82</sup> Thai people have come to expect united royal-military intervention to solve Thailand's political conflict, a concept that is foreign to the Western world but tends to work in Thailand.<sup>83</sup> Thailand's King Bhumibol Adulyadej is not only the longest reigning king but is beloved and considered god-like. While the king's health continues to deteriorate, his potential successor is unlikely to command the same admiration and loyalty from the Thais. Thus, Thailand will need to resolve future political crises through democratic and constitutional means. The journey back to democracy may be a lengthy process for Thailand.

As in any relationship, each side will have to compromise for the U.S.-Thailand relationship to endure. Both sides understand how the coups strained their relationship, but the actions taken resonate more than rhetoric. How strictly the U.S. government

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<sup>81</sup> Chingchit, "After Obama's Visit"; Obama, "National Security Strategy" February 2015, [www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015\\_national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf); "Fact Sheet: The Fiscal Year 2014 Federal Budget and the Asia-Pacific"; U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Relations with Thailand."

<sup>82</sup> Paul M. Handley, *King Never Smiles: A Biography of Thailand's Bhumibol Adulyadej* (New Haven, CT, USA: Yale University Press, 2006), 9–10.; Joshua Kurlantzick, "Can Thailand Break Its Coup Addiction?," *Businessweek*, 4 December 2013, [www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2013-12-04/can-thailand-break-its-coup-addiction](http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2013-12-04/can-thailand-break-its-coup-addiction); International Crisis Group, "A Coup Ordained? Thailand's Prospects for Stability," (3 December 2014), [www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/thailand/263-a-coup-ordained-thailand-s-prospects-for-stability.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/thailand/263-a-coup-ordained-thailand-s-prospects-for-stability.pdf).

<sup>83</sup> Kurlantzick, "Can Thailand Break Its Coup Addiction?."

exercises policies and administrative response to the coups will matter. Thai elites are skeptical about the virtues of the U.S. rebalance to Asia, considering it too confrontational toward China and potentially troublesome for Thai national interest.<sup>84</sup> How far the U.S. government pushes Thailand toward democratization through punishment with sanctions will resonate strongly and could drive Thailand toward China.

## **E. HYPOTHESES AND EXPLANATIONS**

States utilize various methods for self-preservation. Countries form alliances, balance power, and push their ideological objectives using economic, political, and military ties. States that are similar and have shared ideology tend to gravitate toward one another. This is true with the United States and Thailand. For example, both are known as countries of freedom. Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia that was never colonized. Moreover, it has a track record of aligning with great powers for self-preservation through economic interdependence and through investment in military and political shared interests.

Similar to U.S. interest in the Middle East, critics often state that U.S. interest in Thailand is for natural resources, particularly oil, but this does not seem to be the case. Thailand's gross domestic product (GDP) centers around services, industry, and agriculture. Additionally, Thailand has routinely had a strong economy due to industry and agriculture exports such as rice, rubber, sugar, precious stones, computer parts, and other machinery parts. Thailand ranks 30th in the world in crude oil production, 49th in export, and 14th in import of crude oil.<sup>85</sup> Approximately 80 percent of Thailand's crude oil originates offshore in the Gulf of Thailand.<sup>86</sup> With the exception of refined petroleum, Thailand imports and consumes more natural energy resources than it exports.<sup>87</sup> As a

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<sup>84</sup> Berteau, Green, and Cooper, "Assessing the Asia-Pacific Rebalance" 29–30.

<sup>85</sup> Ernest Z. Bower and Murray Hiebert, "Revisiting U.S. Policy toward Post-Coup Thailand," Center for Strategic & International Studies, 25 June 2015, <http://csis.org/print/56447>.

<sup>86</sup> "Thailand International Energy Data and Analysis," U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), March 2016, [www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis.cfm?iso=THA](http://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis.cfm?iso=THA).

<sup>87</sup> Bower and Hiebert, "Revisiting U.S. Policy toward Post-Coup Thailand"; EIA, "Thailand International Energy Data and Analysis."

result, Thailand's oil contributes only a fraction of the 3 percent of other sources in U.S. oil import.<sup>88</sup>

It appears that economic ties show mixed results but fail to explain a weak U.S. response to Thailand's coup. The United States is Thailand's third largest trading partner and foreign direct investor totaling more than \$37 billion in trade and \$13 billion in FDI.<sup>89</sup> Thailand offers lower-cost goods and a relatively educated, cheaper workforce for foreign investment. However, Thailand's political instability and corruption can make investing in the Kingdom unattractive, and the United States has other options for import partners. Neither state's economy is dependent on the other since each enjoys diversified trade with other states.

International relations theories might offer a better explanation for the weak U.S. response to the coup question but still have flaws. The United States would lose creditability as a supporter of democratization if it did not condemn Thailand's coup, and one would expect a stronger U.S. response to the 2006 and 2014 coups. During the Cold War, Thailand was the only democracy on the mainland, and it became a beacon for democratization in the region. When the U.S. makes declarations in international fora, such as the United Nations, having another ally gives its motions greater legitimacy. Thailand has traditionally supported the United States on the international stage, such as during the Gulf Wars and the global war on terrorism. However, a strong U.S. response could backfire.

The most likely answer to the major research question is that the United States has a greater and more familiar military-to-military than a political or economic relationship with Thailand. Before 1991, the U.S.-Thailand alliance blossomed despite Thailand's being under a politically active constitutional monarchy and showing strong military influence in politics. It was not until after the 1991 coup that Thailand exhibited a stable civilian elected political system. Thailand has been a strong supporter and critical ally for

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<sup>88</sup> Corey Flintoff, "Where Does America Get Oil? You May Be Surprised," (12 April 2012), [www.npr.org/2012/04/11/150444802/where-does-america-get-oil-you-may-be-surprised](http://www.npr.org/2012/04/11/150444802/where-does-america-get-oil-you-may-be-surprised).

<sup>89</sup> House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Subcommittee Hearing: Thailand: A Democracy in Peril*, Ed Royce, Chairman, second session, June 24, 2014.

U.S. initiatives in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the war on drugs, but it is exercising caution regarding the South China Sea disputes.<sup>90</sup> During the Vietnam War, Persian Gulf Wars, and humanitarian relief efforts in the region, Thailand's airports and seaports proved vital to U.S. strategic plans. Thailand hosts, along with U.S. troops, the largest military exercise in Asia. One can reason that the military alliance is the U.S. government's top priority and that a severed relationship would tip the balance of Thailand's resources to China. Correspondingly, after the 2014 coup, Daniel R. Russel, a senior U.S. diplomat, became the highest-ranking official to visit Thailand, showing the U.S. commitment to Thailand despite the coup.<sup>91</sup>

Alliance and balance of power theories may better explain U.S. reactions to Thailand's two most recent coups than does democratization theory. The United States values other factors more than democracy, such as loyalty to its military alliances, maintaining balance of power against China, and capitalizing on Thailand's geography. This thesis suggests that stability and balance of power against China are considerably more important to the United States than democratization, at least in the context studied here.

## **F. RESEARCH DESIGN**

A systematic analysis of the conditions and policies that existed before and after each coup was required to understand how Thailand's 2006 and 2014 coups impacted U.S.-Thailand relations and why relations shifted as they did. This thesis conducted a comparative study of Thailand's 2006 and 2014 coups by reviewing and analyzing literature, official government statements, and actions of both the United States and Thailand before and after each coup, covering the timeframe from Thaksin's landslide victory in the 2005 elections to May 2016, two full years after the last coup. The area of focus was limited to economic, security, and diplomatic ties between the United States

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<sup>90</sup> Tony Cartalucci, "Bangkok Blast: Who Has Ax to Grind with Thailand?," *Land Destroyer*, 18 August 2015, [www.landdestroyer.blogspot.com/2015/08/bangkok-blast-who-has-ax-to-grind-with.html](http://www.landdestroyer.blogspot.com/2015/08/bangkok-blast-who-has-ax-to-grind-with.html).

<sup>91</sup> Whitlock, "U.S. Military to Participate in Major Exercise in Thailand Despite Coup"; Russel, "Remarks at the Institute of Security and International Studies."

and Thailand with some discussion of Sino-Thai, Russo-Thai, and ASEAN relations in these three realms.

There is a common understanding of what a coup d'état is, but even the most comprehensive definition must be clarified. The term *coup d'état* originated in the mid-17th century in France meaning “a violent and immediate seizure of state power, usually by armed forces, and with the implication of being undemocratic and unconstitutional.”<sup>92</sup> A key part of this definition is that a coup d'état entails a change in government, usually carried out by the military even if not violent. The change in government is sudden and significant with violence or the threat of violence coming from the military or other concentrations of power.<sup>93</sup> The implication of Thailand's being undemocratic and unconstitutional is that changes in government are carried out illegally, not through formal institutional means such as elections or impeachment. The ruling regime, authoritarian or democratic, can change or remain the same, such as from one authoritarian regime to another, as was the case with most of Thailand's 17 twentieth-century coups. Political elites and important elements in the military often support or plan the coup. Thailand's pattern of governance and coups has been labeled as the “vicious cycle of Thai politics,”<sup>94</sup> or coup cycle. First, this cycle begins with a coup where the military intervenes in politics. Next, the coup often results in the dissolving of both the constitution and parliament in addition to the suspension of political parties. Then the military reconstructs parliament with military or allied personnel until elections resume. The new government often experiences a “honeymoon” period until another crisis sparks, requiring another coup to intervene.<sup>95</sup> As a result of the coup cycle, Thailand has bounced between authoritarianism and democracy.

Democratization is a process and not an event. According to Terry Lynn Karl and Philippe Schmitter, “Modern political democracy is a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting

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<sup>92</sup> Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics, s.v. “coup d'état.”

<sup>93</sup> Thailand's ruling power includes the Queen's Guard, General Prem Tinsulanonda loyalist in the military, Privy Council.

<sup>94</sup> Mushkat, “Policy Implications of Thailand's Unexpected Coup,” 159.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 159–61.



indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representative.”<sup>96</sup> Hence, democratization is “the process of becoming a democracy.”<sup>97</sup> More specifically, democracy includes free and fair elections, free media, transparency, and accountability through a system of checks and balances. Further, the government is structured with a division of power between judicial, executive, and legislative bodies. Democratization takes time and often experiences setbacks.

The sources necessary to understand the U.S.-Thailand economic, security, and political relationships include official policy statements, hearings, and reports from the following: U.S. foreign policy documents and press releases, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the World Bank, the IMF, the *Economist*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Far Eastern Economic Review*. In addition to the listed sources that overlap with economic relations, diplomatic political sources include documents from the U.S. Department of State, the Congressional Research Service, the U.S. Embassy in Thailand, the *New York Times*, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand. Security-related sources and data include the Joint United States Military Advisory Group (JUSMAG) Thailand, FMS data, non-NATO ally status and privileges law and policy statements, IMET records, Department of State travel warnings, and the number and constitution of military personnel in the U.S. Embassy and consulates. Finally, interviews with personnel from the Asia Foundation in San Francisco, JUSMAG Thailand, and the Naval Postgraduate School International Graduate Programs Office seek answers about facts, not viewpoints.

## **G. THESIS OVERVIEW**

This thesis was organized as follows. Chapter I framed the major research question and established the significance of how and why Thailand’s 2006 and 2014 coup affected the U.S.-Thailand relationship. This included history on Thailand and on the partnership that began over 182 years ago and steadily deepened over time. Chapter II

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<sup>96</sup> Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, “What Democracy Is. . . and Is Not,” *Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 3 (1991): 76.

<sup>97</sup> I. McLean and A. McMillan, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

explored the U.S.-Thailand relationship that existed before and after Thailand's 2006 coup. This chapter was broken down into three sections focusing on economic ties, security arrangements, and diplomatic relations. Each of the three sections considered conditions that existed pre- and post-coup. Chapter III explored the U.S.-Thailand relationship that existed before and after the 2014 coup; the sections and subsections were divided in the same format as those in Chapter II. Chapter IV provided a comparative analysis of the economic, diplomatic, and security conditions both before and after the 2006 and 2014 coups. Chapter V summarized the findings, explained the implications to the relationship and theory, and offered recommendations for U.S. foreign policy toward Thailand and Asia more generally.

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## II. 2006 COUP

The formal relationship of the United States with Thailand is older than the U.S. relationship with any other country in Asia. This partnership first began in 1833 with the Treaty of Amity and Commerce and later developed with Thailand's becoming a formal treaty ally in 1954 under the Manila Pact of SEATO and the 1962 Thanat-Rusk communiqué. The relationship has strengthened across the instruments of national power: economic, political, and military security cooperation. In the early 2000s, Thailand was rewarded for demonstrating enhanced commitment to the U.S. global war on terrorism. U.S.-Thailand relations appeared to strengthen after 9/11 but were then interrupted by Thailand's 2006 coup. The United States formally disapproved of Thailand's democratic setback and struggled to maintain the relationship while imposing legislatively mandated military aid suspension. However, after Thailand reestablished a democratically elected civilian government, the United States resumed military aid and continued strong bilateral economic, political, and security cooperation. Some initiatives changed as a result of the coup, but those changes were not significant enough to terminate or even substantially harm the relationship.

### A. ECONOMIC RELATIONS

The United States and Thailand have a long history of economic relations that are mutually beneficial. In 1833, they signed the Treaty of Amity and Commerce, and in 1966, the Treaty of Amity and Economic Relations was updated to grant economic access to each country's market. In 2004, the United States and Thailand initiated negotiations for an FTA.<sup>98</sup> Thailand's GDP on a purchasing power parity (PPP) is the second largest in Southeast Asia after Indonesia, making Thailand an attractive market for the United States. The United States was Thailand's largest export market in 2005 and the Kingdom's fourth largest trading partner behind ASEAN, Japan, and the European Union

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<sup>98</sup> George W. Bush, "Fact Sheet on Free Trade and Thailand," ed. the White House (Washington DC: Office of the Press Secretary, 2003), 1; Chanlett-Avery, Dolven, and Mackey, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2015), 10, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Robert Looney, "Thaksinomics: A New Asian Paradigm," *The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies* 29 (2004): 66.

(EU).<sup>99</sup> FDI connects and typically improves both the recipient and investing economy. Since Thailand's economy depends heavily on foreign investment, Thailand fosters a nurturing environment for foreign investors. Specifically, the revised Treaty of Amity and Commerce favors U.S. investors above all other foreign investors. This section will describe their pre- and post-coup economic relationship relating to FTA negotiations, bilateral trade, and FDI, demonstrating that the 2006 coup did not have a negative effect on the U.S.-Thailand economic relationship overall, despite some posturing and roadblocks.

### **1. Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**

Trade relations between the United States and Thailand gained momentum in recent decades due to the proven resiliency of Thailand's economy and despite successful coups in 1980 and 1991 and a failed coup attempt in 1985. Indeed, in the 1980s and 1990s, Thailand had one of the world's fastest growing economies.<sup>100</sup> Its economy developed quickly along with several other "Asian Tigers," such as South Korea and Taiwan, but suffered a devastating crisis in 1997–98. Following the crisis, Thailand's economy was stabilized by stipulations of economic reforms designed to restore confidence by establishing a strong regulation framework and a \$17.2 billion loan from IMF.<sup>101</sup> By 2003, Thailand appeared to have fully recovered from the Asian financial crisis and repaid its outstanding obligations under the IMF four years ahead of

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<sup>99</sup> Emma Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2007), 13, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

<sup>100</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit, "The Thai Economy in the Mid-1990s," *Southeast Asian Affairs* (1996): 369.

<sup>101</sup> Raymond J. Ahearn and Wayne M. Morrison, *U.S.-Thailand Free Trade Agreement Negotiations* (CRS Report No. RL32314) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2005), 4, <http://nationalaglawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/crs/RL32314.pdf>; Wayne M. Morrison, *Thailand-U.S. Economic Relations: An Overview* (CRS Report No. RS21478) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2003), 2, <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=445651>; "Trade Policy Review Thailand," World Trade Organization (15 October 2003): 9, [www.docs.wto.org/dol2fe/Pages/FE\\_Search/FE\\_S\\_S006.aspx?Query=\(\(%20@Title=%20thailand\)%20or%20\(@CountryConcerned=%20thailand\)\)%20and%20\(%20\(%20@Symbol=%20wt/tpr/s/\\*%20\)%20or%20\(%20@Symbol=%20wt/tpr/g/\\*%20\)\)&Language=ENGLISH&Context=FomerScriptedSearch&languageUIChanged=true#](http://www.docs.wto.org/dol2fe/Pages/FE_Search/FE_S_S006.aspx?Query=((%20@Title=%20thailand)%20or%20(@CountryConcerned=%20thailand))%20and%20(%20(%20@Symbol=%20wt/tpr/s/*%20)%20or%20(%20@Symbol=%20wt/tpr/g/*%20))&Language=ENGLISH&Context=FomerScriptedSearch&languageUIChanged=true#).

schedule.<sup>102</sup> This rapid recovery demonstrated the strength, resilience, and attractiveness of Thailand as a trade partner.

In 2002, the two countries signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) that set the foundation for a bilateral FTA.<sup>103</sup> On 19 October 2003, President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra began concerted negotiations on a U.S.-Thailand FTA that would promote exports and protect investments.<sup>104</sup> Subsequently, they conducted five rounds of negotiations and anticipated a signed agreement sometime in 2006.<sup>105</sup> The FTA appeared favorable and tenable, but in April 2006, just six months prior to the September coup, the Thai government suspended negotiations to focus on contentious domestic politics.

The 2006 coup changed the direction of the FTA, but this change did not significantly affect either country's economy. Immediately following the coup, U.S. trade officials announced that FTA negotiations would not continue until Thailand returned to democracy.<sup>106</sup> Neither country reengaged FTA discussions; however, in August 2006, the United States signed a TIFA with ASEAN, which included Thailand. Both countries continued to sign FTAs with other partners, with a greater emphasis on multilateral agreements, such as TPP and ASEAN FTAs.<sup>107</sup> In 2007, the Thai Office of Commercial

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<sup>102</sup> Thailand prepaid its debt by 31 July 2003. "Trade Policy Review Thailand," 6, 9; Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2007), 13, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

<sup>103</sup> Morrison, *Thailand-U.S. Economic Relations: An Overview* (CRS Report No. RS21478) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2003), 6, <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=445651>.

<sup>104</sup> Ahearn and Morrison, *U.S.-Thailand Free Trade Agreement Negotiations* (CRS Report No. RL32314) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2005), 1, <http://nationalaglawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/crs/RL32314.pdf>.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.; James Hookway, "Politics & Economics: Thailand Appoints Interim Premier; Naming of Retired General May Not Ease the Pressure from Allies, Including U.S.," *Wall Street Journal*, 2 October 2006, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.nps.edu/docview/398988726/3C76916A786E421DPQ/11?accountid=12702>.

<sup>106</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2007), 13, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

<sup>107</sup> Chanlett-Avery, Dolven, and Mackey, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2015), 9–10, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

Affairs announced that the U.S.-Thailand FTA negotiations were delayed indefinitely.<sup>108</sup> This development lay in sharp contrast to Thailand's trade agreements with other states. For instance, Thailand secured agreements with countries including Bahrain, China, India, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and Peru between 2002 and 2011, and continued to aggressively pursue FTAs with South Korea, Chile, and the EU to increase trading opportunities.<sup>109</sup> After the U.S.-Thailand FTA negotiations were put on hold by Thailand, Thailand's economy continued to expand. Thailand's overall economic situation in 2007 continued on an upward trend. According to the Bank of Thailand, the country's export-oriented model remained strong with a 4.9 percent GDP growth rate in 2007, which slowed to 2.6 percent growth in 2008, in large part because of the global economic crisis.<sup>110</sup>

Although FTA negotiations were halted, U.S.-Thailand trade did not appear to change after the 2006 coup. Thailand relies heavily on trade, but as indicated in Figure 1, Thailand's economic growth between 2000 and 2010 was not affected by the coup. GDP is one of the primary metrics used to measure the health of a country's overall economy, representing the total dollar value of all goods and services over a period of time.<sup>111</sup> The data in Figure 1 were drawn from Trading Economics' online database, which was

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<sup>108</sup> Emma Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008), 13, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

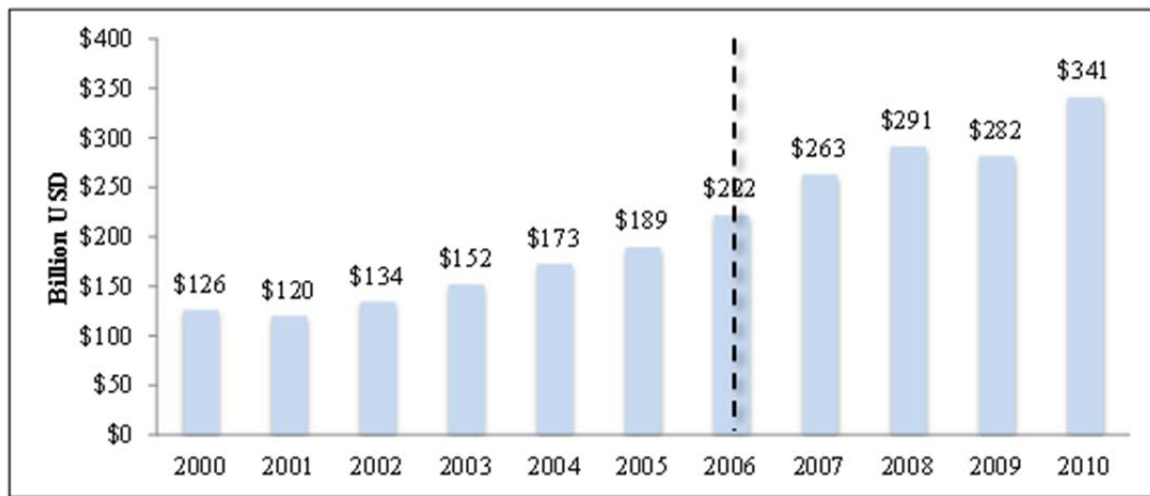
<sup>109</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2007), 14, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; "By Country/Economy - Free Trade Agreements," Asian Development Bank, 15 December 2015, <https://aric.adb.org/fta-country>.

<sup>110</sup> Monetary Policy Group Bank of Thailand, "Thailand's Economic and Monetary Conditions in 2007," *Bank of Thailand* (March 2008), [www.bot.or.th/English/MonetaryPolicy/EconomicConditions/AnnualReport/AnnualReport/AnnualReport\\_2007.pdf](http://www.bot.or.th/English/MonetaryPolicy/EconomicConditions/AnnualReport/AnnualReport/AnnualReport_2007.pdf); "Thailand's Economic and Monetary Conditions in 2008," *Bank of Thailand* (March 2009), [www.bot.or.th/English/MonetaryPolicy/EconomicConditions/AnnualReport/AnnualReport/AnnualReport\\_2008.pdf](http://www.bot.or.th/English/MonetaryPolicy/EconomicConditions/AnnualReport/AnnualReport/AnnualReport_2008.pdf).

<sup>111</sup> World Bank definition of GDP: "GDP at purchaser's prices is the sum of gross value added by all resident producers in the economy plus any product taxes and minus any subsidies not included in the value of the products. It is calculated without making deductions for depreciation of fabricated assets or for depletion and degradation of natural resources. Data are in current U.S. dollars. Dollar figures for GDP are converted from domestic currencies using single year official exchange rates. For a few countries where the official exchange rate does not reflect the rate effectively applied to actual foreign exchange transactions, an alternative conversion factor is used." "GDP," The World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>.

selected because it included historical data captured from the World Bank Group. Thailand's GDP trajectory improved consistently during this decade.<sup>112</sup> The 2006 coup appeared to have no impact on Thailand's economic growth, and the only significant decline occurred after the global financial crisis of 2008. The coup ended U.S.-Thailand FTA negotiations but appears not to have hindered economic growth or trade relations.

Figure 1. Thailand Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 2000–2010.<sup>113</sup>



The dashed bar represents the 2006 coup.

## 2. Bilateral Trade

As noted, the United States and Thailand have a strong and lasting economic relationship centered on bilateral trade that mutually benefits both states. Bilateral trade benefits each country in different ways. For Thailand, bilateral trade increases economic competitiveness and the market share of Thai goods. For the United States, Thailand is appealing because it is the second largest economy in Southeast Asia and an important transit point for markets in Thailand's neighboring countries. Thailand was also a

<sup>112</sup> Trading Economics, "Thailand GDP," 15 December 2015, [www.tradingeconomics.com/thailand/gdp](http://www.tradingeconomics.com/thailand/gdp). Embassy of the Philippines, "Overview of Philippines and Thailand Relations," 15 December 2015, <http://bangkokpe.dfa.gov.ph/about-us/overview-of-phils-and-thailand-realations>.

<sup>113</sup> Adapted from Trading Economics, [www.tradingeconomics.com/thailand/gdp](http://www.tradingeconomics.com/thailand/gdp).



founding member of ASEAN, which was formed to counter the spread of communism in Southeast Asia and to promote political and economic cooperation and regional stability.

In the years leading up to the coup, U.S.-Thailand bilateral trade grew annually between 1997 and 2006. In 2000, the total bilateral trade appeared to peak at \$23 billion, but then it continued to improve in 2004, 2005, and 2006 with total trade values of \$23.9 billion, \$27.1 billion, and \$30.3 billion, respectively.<sup>114</sup> In 2005, the United States was Thailand's largest export destination, and U.S.-Thailand bilateral trade continued to strengthen with solid annual increases. In 2005, Thailand was the United States' 23rd largest trading partner; the United States was Thailand's fourth largest trading partner.<sup>115</sup>

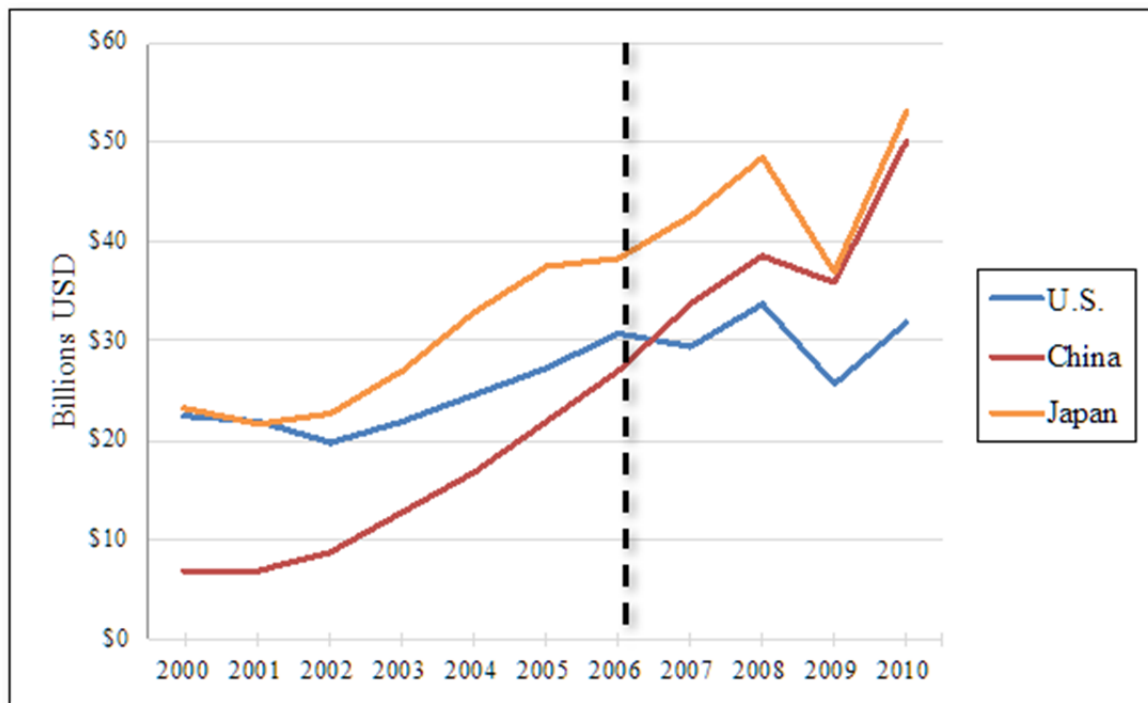
Bilateral trade between Thailand and the United States, Japan, and China from 2000 to 2010 is illustrated in Figure 2. This data were drawn from the Observatory of Economic Complexity's (OEC) online database. While the figures from the U.S. Census Bureau are somewhat different, the trends with the United States are similar but did not include bilateral trade between other states and Thailand. The OEC database was selected for consistency when comparing countries. The bilateral trade lines represent the sum of imports and exports between Thailand and its partners. Overall, bilateral trade between Thailand and all of these countries steadily increased from 2000 to 2010. The Asian financial crisis of 1997 and Thailand's road to recovery appeared to slow trade from 2000 to 2002. However, after Thailand's early repayment of its debt to the IMF, bilateral trade grew at a steady rate. After the coup in 2006, trade appeared to accelerate from 2007 to 2010, with a minor setback during the global financial crisis in 2008. In fact, the 2008 global financial crisis appears to have had a much greater impact on U.S.-Thailand bilateral trade relations than the 2006 coup.

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<sup>114</sup> U.S. Census Bureau Foreign Trade Division, "Foreign Trade: Data," [www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5490.html](http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5490.html).

<sup>115</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2007), 13, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; "NAFTA Partners Lead Strong U.S. Export Growth," U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, 15 December 2015, [www.trade.gov/press/publications/newsletters/ita\\_0706/nafta\\_0706.asp](http://www.trade.gov/press/publications/newsletters/ita_0706/nafta_0706.asp).

Figure 2. Thailand's Bilateral Trade with Top Partners, 2000–2010<sup>116</sup>



The dashed vertical line represents Thailand's 2006 coup.

Thailand's bilateral trade with the United States may have temporarily plateaued in 2006, but, on balance, it was not negatively affected by the coup. Indeed, one justification for the coup was to restore stability, investor confidence, and economic production after months of escalating and sometimes violent standoffs between the Red Shirt and Yellow Shirt protestors.<sup>117</sup> Following the 2006 coup, U.S.-Thailand economic trade relations, for the most part, remained positive, and bilateral trade continued to increase. Figure 3 shows that U.S.-Thailand bilateral trade increased to \$31.1 billion in 2007 and \$32.6 billion in 2008.<sup>118</sup> This data were drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau

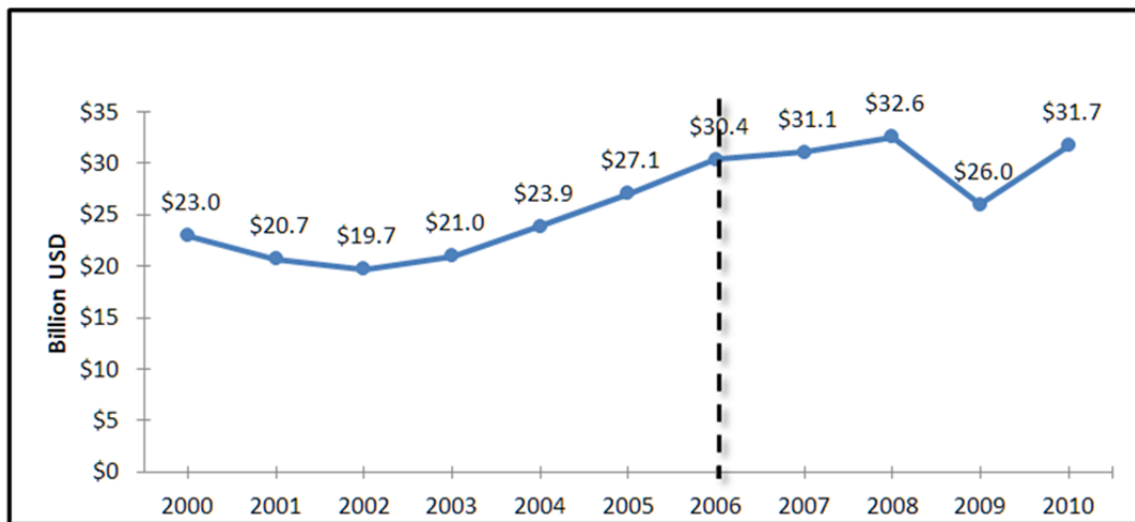
<sup>116</sup> Adapted from the Observatory of Economic Complexity, "What is the trade balance for Thailand to the United States? (2000-2010)," 27 December 2015, <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/line/hs92/show/tha/usa/all/2000.2010/>.

<sup>117</sup> Dan Rivers, Richard Roth, and Narunart Prapanya, "Thailand's King Gives Blessing to Coup," CNN.com, 20 September 2006, [www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/asiapcf/09/20/thailand.coup.king/](http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/asiapcf/09/20/thailand.coup.king/); "Thailand after the Coup," *Strategic Comments* 12, no. 9 (2006): 1–2; Pavin Chachavalponpun, *Good Coup Gone Bad: Thailand's Political Development since Thaksin's Downfall* (Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2014), 1–2.

<sup>118</sup> Division, "Foreign Trade: Data." 15 December 2015, [www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5490.html](http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5490.html).

online database, and the trend line represents the sum of imports and exports between the United States and Thailand. Trade continued to rise from 2006 to 2008, albeit at a slower rate than the previous five years. According to the U.S. State Department, in 2007, the United States became Thailand's largest export destination while Thailand was the United States' 27th-largest export destination, a drop of only three places from 2005. Bilateral trade showed positive signs of growth until the global financial crisis.

Figure 3. U.S.-Thailand Bilateral Trade 2000–2010<sup>119</sup>



The dashed vertical line represents Thailand's 2006 coup.

### 3. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)

Since 1833, with the signing of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce, the United States and Thailand have shared strong economic relations that favor U.S. investors over other foreign investors. Thailand's economy significantly depends on FDI, and the United States has incentives for its investors under the Treaty of Amity and Economic

<sup>119</sup> Adapted from the U.S. Census Bureau, "Foreign Trade: Trade in Goods with Thailand," 15 December 2015, [www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5490.html](http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5490.html).

Relations.<sup>120</sup> In 1966, just prior to the intense escalation of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, President Lyndon Johnson visited Thailand and agreed to the new Treaty of Amity and Economic Relations that granted both U.S. and Thai investors, with limited exceptions, “national treatment” when conducting business in the partner country.<sup>121</sup> Simply, the treaty offers preferential treatment only extended to U.S. investors. U.S. investors can operate businesses in Thailand with equal rights as Thai businesses and are exempt from most of the restrictions imposed by Thailand’s Alien Business Law of 1972.<sup>122</sup> Additionally, the treaty grants both U.S. and Thai investors considerable access to one another’s economic markets.<sup>123</sup> During his terms of office from 2001 to 2006, Prime Minister Thaksin employed a dual track economic policy that combined domestic stimulus with the time-proven foreign trade and investment strategy. According to the American Chamber of Commerce, the United States was the second largest foreign investor in Thailand prior to the 2006 coup.<sup>124</sup>

Figure 4 shows U.S. FDI in Thailand from 2000 to 2010. These data were extracted from the Bank of Thailand’s online database. While the figures from ASEAN’s *Statistical Yearbook* are somewhat different, the trends are similar. The ASEAN secretariat collects data from country bank submission and national statistical offices

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<sup>120</sup> According to the World Bank, Foreign Direct Investment refers to when “direct investment equity flows in the reporting economy. It is the sum of equity capital, reinvestment of earnings, and other capital. Direct investment is a category of cross-border investment associated with a resident in one economy having control or a significant degree of influence on the management of an enterprise that is resident in another economy. Ownership of 10% or more of the ordinary shares of voting stock is the criterion for determining the existence of a direct investment relationship.” “Foreign Direct Investment, Net Inflows (BoP, Current US\$),” World Bank, 27 December 2015, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.KLT.DINV.CD.WD>.

<sup>121</sup> “Timeline of U.S.-Thai Relations,” Embassy of the United States: Bangkok, Thailand, 16 July 2015, <http://bangkok.usembassy.gov/relation/timeline.html>.

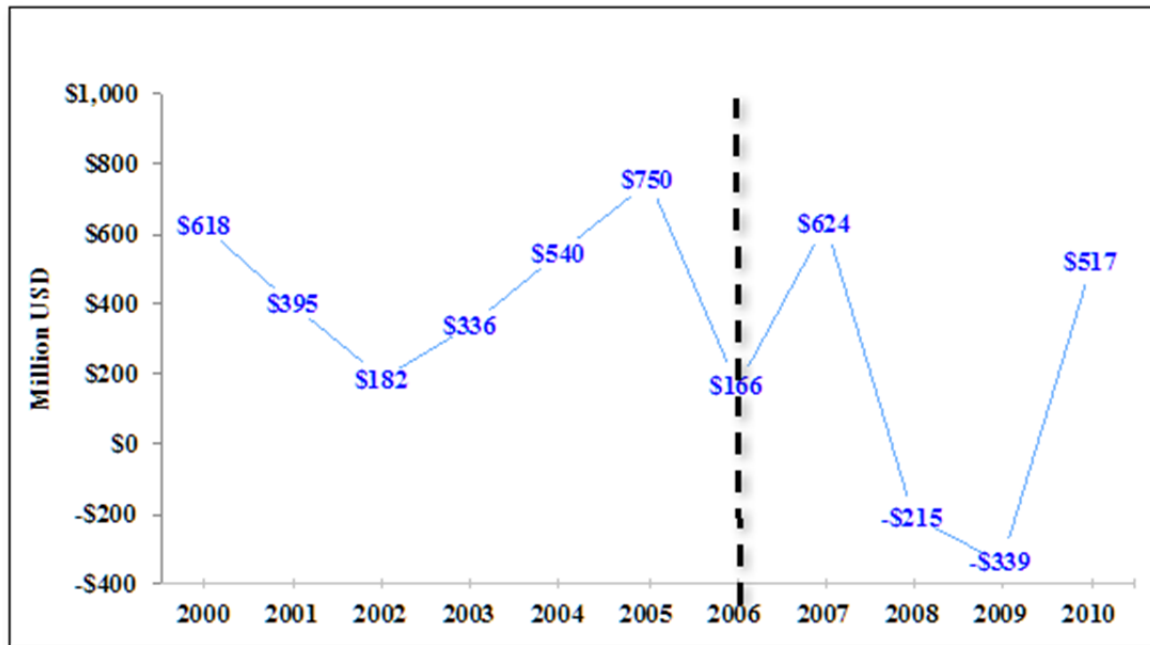
<sup>122</sup> Ahearn and Morrison, *U.S.-Thailand Free Trade Agreement Negotiations* (CRS Report No. RL32314) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2005), 12, <http://nationalaglawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/crs/RL32314.pdf>; “Doing Business in Thailand,” Embassy of the United States: Bangkok Thailand, 7 March 2016, <http://bangkok.usembassy.gov/doing-business-local.html>.

<sup>123</sup> U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Relations with Thailand.” 6 November 2015, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2814.htm>

<sup>124</sup> Ahearn and Morrison, *U.S.-Thailand Free Trade Agreement Negotiations* (CRS Report No. RL32314) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2005), 6–7, <http://nationalaglawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/crs/RL32314.pdf>; Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2006), 12, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

through the ASEAN Working Group on International Investment. The Bank of Thailand database was chosen because it was the direct source of information. Throughout the year, investors move money in and out of companies in Thailand, and Figure 4 shows the year-end annual difference. The U.S. dollar amount is positive when the inflow exceeds outflow. Although investments from 2000 to 2002 were a net positive, U.S. investors appeared cautious and invested less each year. After repaying its rescue debt ahead of schedule, Thailand appeared to be a favorable investment destination, and U.S. FDI resumed upward from \$182.34 million in 2002 to \$750.48 million in 2005.<sup>125</sup> Political instability in 2006 leading up to the September coup appeared to hinder investment, but FDI inflow still remained positive for the year and nearly returned to pre-coup levels in 2007. FDI inflow still remained positive for the year and nearly returned to pre-coup levels in 2007.

Figure 4. U.S. FDI inflow to Thailand from 2000–2010<sup>126</sup>



The dashed bar represents the 2006 coup.

<sup>125</sup> Beina Xu and Eleanor Albert, “Understanding Myanmar,” *Council on Foreign Relations* (23 November 2015), [www.cfr.org/human-rights/understanding-myanmar/p14385](http://www.cfr.org/human-rights/understanding-myanmar/p14385).

<sup>126</sup> Adapted from the Bank of Thailand, Net Flow of Foreign Direct Investment Classified by Country (US\$), 27 December 2015, [www2.bot.or.th/statistics/ReportPage.aspx?reportID=75&language=eng](http://www2.bot.or.th/statistics/ReportPage.aspx?reportID=75&language=eng).

Events leading up to the coup created instability, especially in Bangkok, that appears to have constrained U.S. FDI in Thailand in 2006. However, after the military stabilized domestic affairs in the fourth quarter, investment flourished until the global financial crisis in 2008. Although FDI declined in 2006, U.S. investors still favored Thailand, and FDI remained positive at \$165.78 million. According to the World Trade Organization, the United States contributed 8 percent of Thailand's overall FDI in 2006, a share that has held relatively steady throughout the 2000s.<sup>127</sup> The volume of transactions associated with the increase in investment in 2006 was higher than that associated with the decrease in investment, meaning more U.S. investment went into Thailand than came out.

Following the coup, the interim government attempted to impose control measures that might have had a negative impact on foreign investors. The military government imposed measures, which it later reversed, that would restrict foreign ownership in Thai companies.<sup>128</sup> These policies stemmed from criticism generated by the sale of the Thaksin family's telecommunication company to a Singaporean state-owned enterprise. Large international drug companies, several of which are U.S. owned, responded negatively to news of the restrictions, causing the interim government to cancel the change, and U.S. companies continued to directly invest in Thailand. Figure 4 shows an increase to \$623.92 million in U.S. FDI in 2007, strongly suggesting the coup did not have a significant effect on U.S. investors.

After returning to a civilian elected government, Thailand remained a favorable investment destination for U.S. investors, but the global financial crisis of 2008 had a great impact, causing investors to pull money out of Thailand. In 2008 and 2009, U.S. investors withdrew \$214.5 million and \$339.37 million, respectively. However, by 2010,

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<sup>127</sup> "Trade Policy Review Report by Thailand," World Trade Organization (22 October 2007): 6, [https://docs.wto.org/dol2fe/Pages/FE\\_Search/FE\\_S\\_S006.aspx?Query=\(\(%20@Title=%20thailand\)%20or%20\(@CountryConcerned=%20thailand\)\)%20and%20\(%20\(%20@Symbol=%20wt/tpr/s/\\*%20\)%20or%200\(%20@Symbol=%20wt/tpr/g/\\*%20\)\)&Language=ENGLISH&Context=FomerScriptedSearch&languageUIChanged=true#](https://docs.wto.org/dol2fe/Pages/FE_Search/FE_S_S006.aspx?Query=((%20@Title=%20thailand)%20or%20(@CountryConcerned=%20thailand))%20and%20(%20(%20@Symbol=%20wt/tpr/s/*%20)%20or%200(%20@Symbol=%20wt/tpr/g/*%20))&Language=ENGLISH&Context=FomerScriptedSearch&languageUIChanged=true#).

<sup>128</sup> Kevin Daly and Chanikarn Teresa Tosompark, "Determinants of Foreign Direct Investment in Thailand," in *The Impact of the Global Financial Crisis on Emerging Financial Markets* (United Kingdom: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2015), 717.

Thailand was again a favorable place for U.S. investors with U.S. FDI increasing to \$516.94 million. The data suggests the global financial crisis had a greater impact than the 2006 coup on U.S. FDI in Thailand.

## **B. SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS**

Security cooperation between the United States and Thailand is deep rooted and resilient, despite recent challenges. Thailand has been considered one of the major U.S. security allies in Southeast Asia for over 50 years. SEATO's 1954 Manila Pact, which was created at the behest of the United States, and the 1962 Thanat-Rusk communiqué solidified the two states' military security cooperation. The relationship was built on the foundation of anti-communism, as Thailand was the region's central anti-Communist ally during the Vietnam and Cold Wars. The U.S.-Thailand bilateral Cobra Gold annual exercise began to showcase combined military force capabilities against Vietnam during the Cold War. Both countries' security interests were aligned, and both cooperated against a common enemy. Vietnam's 1978 invasion and decade-long occupation of Cambodia, Thailand's direct neighbor, only served to solidify the U.S.-Thailand security partnership, especially given the USSR's support for Vietnam's aggression.<sup>129</sup> After the Cold War, transnational security problems, from drug trafficking to terrorism, became the most salient common threats.

In the 2000s, the U.S. and Thailand security relations continued to strengthen and align against terrorism. The events of 9/11, in combination with Thailand's support against terrorism in Southeast Asia, enhanced U.S.-Thailand security relations. During the Persian Gulf Wars and global war on terrorism, Thailand allowed strategic U.S. military access to ports and airfields in Thailand that helped maintain a critical logistics flow of troops, equipment, and supplies both in and out of theater.<sup>130</sup> In 2003, President

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<sup>129</sup> Stephen J. Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia: Political Culture and the Causes of War* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 1–2.

<sup>130</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2007), 9–10, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

George W. Bush designated Thailand a major non-NATO ally.<sup>131</sup> This distinction placed Thailand in an exclusive group of nations that enjoys especially close defense cooperation, such as favored conditions for purchase of weapons and military aid. Additionally, Thailand served as a logistics hub for U.S. and international relief efforts after the 2004 tsunami.

Security cooperation has been the strongest pillar of the U.S.-Thailand relationship. This section explores the security cooperation displayed by Cobra Gold, the IMET program, the FMS program, and the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) and concludes that legally mandated suspension of military aid did not sever the U.S.-Thailand security relationship.

## **1. Cobra Gold**

Training exercises enhance coordination and cooperation between nations, and Cobra Gold has grown to become the largest multilateral exercise in the Asia-Pacific region, boasting seven members and 20 observers in 2015.<sup>132</sup> Cobra Gold's origins can be traced back to the 1965 bilateral U.S.-Thailand naval exercise Operation TEAMWORK that included surface and antisubmarine, underwater demolition, mine warfare, and amphibious operations with U.S. Marines and Royal Thai Marines.<sup>133</sup> Operation TEAMWORK was a demonstration of force and security cooperation among allies against Vietnam. It provided the framework for the inaugural annual exercises that began in 1982 and combined several naval exercises into what came to be known as Cobra Gold.<sup>134</sup> The first Cobra Gold included four armed forces branches: Royal Thai

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<sup>131</sup> Chambers, "U.S.-Thai Relations after 9/11" 269; Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2005), 8, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

<sup>132</sup> In addition to Thailand and the United States, Cobra Gold members currently include U.S. treaty allies Japan and South Korea, as well as solid U.S. military partners, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. Among the observer nations in 2015 were Thailand's direct neighbors Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Burma, as well as China, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Russia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam. Wiraj Sripong, "'Refocused' Cobra Gold to Go Ahead," (29 January 2015), [www.nationmultimedia.com/politics/Refocused-Cobra-Gold-to-go-ahead-30252918.html](http://www.nationmultimedia.com/politics/Refocused-Cobra-Gold-to-go-ahead-30252918.html); Parameswaran, "U.S.-Thailand Relations and Cobra Gold 2015."

<sup>133</sup> "Cobra Gold: A Look at 25 Years of History," United States Army Pacific, [www.usarpac.army.mil/pdfs/Cobra\\_Gold\\_25th.pdf](http://www.usarpac.army.mil/pdfs/Cobra_Gold_25th.pdf).

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 2; Chambers, "U.S.-Thai Relations after 9/11," 461.



Navy, Royal Thai Air Force, U.S. Navy, and U.S. Marine Corps. In 1984, the U.S. Army participated in Cobra Gold, and since 1990, the role of the exercise's executive agent has alternated between the U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC) and the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Pacific (MARFORPAC). Over 13,000 military personnel participated in the 2015 exercises.<sup>135</sup>

In the 1990s, with most Cold War threats ebbing, Cobra Gold not only survived a possible disruption but also continued to expand with new members and observers. In 1991, Royal Thai Army commander-in-chief General Suchinda Kraprayoon overthrew the Thai government in a coup, but after considering suspension of the exercise, the U.S. State Department approved Cobra Gold to resume the following year with full participation.<sup>136</sup> In 1993, Thailand formally made its airfields and port facilities available to the U.S. military through a logistics agreement.<sup>137</sup> In 1994, other countries such as Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Australia accepted Thailand's invitation to attend Cobra Gold as observers. By the end of the 1990s, Cobra Gold opened participation to other states.

In the following decade, the bilateral exercise grew to include a wider mission scope. In 2000, Singapore became the third nation to participate in Cobra Gold, and in 2004, the Philippines and Mongolia joined as participants. Following the 2004 tsunami, Cobra Gold's mission shifted to include a multinational interagency disaster relief workshop and a combined staff exercise with emphasis on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations. Cobra Gold 2005 focused on HADR and expanded to include participants from the military and governmental, nongovernmental, and private organizations from the United States, Thailand, Singapore, and Japan. Observing states in 2005 included China, Pakistan, Cambodia, Israel, and the United Arab Emirates. What started as a bilateral exercise between the United States and Thailand has grown over the

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<sup>135</sup> Associated Press, "Thai-U.S. Launch Cobra Gold Military Exercise Amid Tensions over Coup," (9 February 2015), [www.militarytimes.com/story/military/2015/02/09/thai-us-launch-cobra-gold-military-exercise-amid-tensions-over-coup/23144971/](http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/2015/02/09/thai-us-launch-cobra-gold-military-exercise-amid-tensions-over-coup/23144971/).

<sup>136</sup> Chambers, "U.S.-Thai Relations after 9/11," 461–62; "Cobra Gold: A Look at 25 Years of History," 4.

<sup>137</sup> Chambers, "U.S.-Thai Relations after 9/11," 462.

decades to become the largest exercise in the world, with significant diplomatic and security implications.<sup>138</sup>

In May 2006, before the coup, military exercises between the United States and Thailand remained similar in nature to the preceding five years in that observing and participating states continued to rise steadily. There was no decrease in Cobra Gold activity following Thailand's war on drugs between 2003 and 2005 that saw approximately 2,800 individuals extrajudicially killed.<sup>139</sup> In addition to Cobra Gold, U.S.-Thailand joint military exercises totaled 40 per year.<sup>140</sup> Cobra Gold 2006, which took place in May, included over 7,800 U.S. military personnel and 4,200 Royal Thai armed forces. Additionally, Singapore, Japan, and Indonesia participated in the multinational exercise.<sup>141</sup> The exercise also provided opportunities for enhancing security relations through exposure of participants and observers.

The democratic setback in Thailand in 2006 was not enough to disrupt strong military cooperation with the United States. Bilateral and multinational exercises such as Cobra Gold continued with little variance. The United States and Thailand continued joint military exercises at a pace of 40 per year, highlighted by the multinational Cobra Gold in May 2007. Although U.S. troop participation was reduced, this scale-down was due to operational commitments in support of both Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.<sup>142</sup> The United States and Thailand continued to work

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<sup>138</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2005), 8–16, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008), 8, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; “Cobra Gold: A Look at 25 Years of History.”

<sup>139</sup> A special committee report in 2007 stated that of the 2,819 people killed in 2003, 1449 were unrelated to drug dealing or had no clear reason for their killings. “Thailand: Prosecute Anti-Drugs Police Identified in Abuses,” Human Rights Watch (7 February 2008), [www.hrw.org/news/2008/02/07/thailand-prosecute-anti-drugs-police-identified-abuses](http://www.hrw.org/news/2008/02/07/thailand-prosecute-anti-drugs-police-identified-abuses); “Thailand’s ‘War on Drugs’,” Human Rights Watch (12 March 2008), [www.hrw.org/news/2008/03/12/thailands-war-drugs](http://www.hrw.org/news/2008/03/12/thailands-war-drugs).

<sup>140</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2007), <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>142</sup> Personal phone conversation with Marine Corps Officer Monitor, March 14, 2007, Okinawa, Japan.

together with an expanded mission scope, allowing for a seamless transition to real-world crises in the region.

The United States was hesitant to cut off Cobra Gold and relations with Thailand after the coup, as this type of training proved to be too important. Cobra Gold's HADR training with multinational members enhanced familiarity with the United States, Thailand, and regional partners, helping to improve cooperation and understanding. In 2008, Cyclone Nargis struck Burma during the Cobra Gold exercise.<sup>143</sup> Analysts suggest that Nargis compared to Hurricane Katrina but was many times more deadly due to Burma's poor infrastructure, with estimates of up to 84,500 deceased and 53,800 missing.<sup>144</sup> The preparations for the HADR portion of the Cobra Gold mission fortuitously staged humanitarian assistance nearby to support Burma. Further, Thailand's Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej convinced Burma's junta to open its doors to international organizations and militaries to provide much-needed assistance, something Burma was initially reluctant to do.

Alexander A. Arvizu, deputy chief of mission for the U.S. Embassy in Thailand from 2004 to 2007, asserts that "Cobra Gold has been the most visible symbol of United States and Thai military cooperation."<sup>145</sup> Since its inception in 1982, Cobra Gold has continued uninterrupted despite Thailand's democratic setbacks and threats by the United States to cancel the exercise. Cobra Gold's resilience strongly suggests that bilateral and multilateral military security cooperation has been too important for both countries and for other participating states and observers.

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<sup>143</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008), 9, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

<sup>144</sup> Michael Casey, "Why the Cyclone in Myanmar Was So Deadly," *National Geographic*, 28 October 2010, <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2008/05/080508-AP-the-perfect.html>; "Myanmar: Cyclone Nargis 2008 Facts and Figures - IFRC," International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 3 May 2011, [www.ifrc.org/en/news-and-media/news-stories/asia-pacific/myanmar/myanmar-cyclone-nargis-2008-facts-and-figures/](http://www.ifrc.org/en/news-and-media/news-stories/asia-pacific/myanmar/myanmar-cyclone-nargis-2008-facts-and-figures/).

<sup>145</sup> Mark Fayloga, "Pacific Partners Come Together for Cobra Gold 2007." 8 May 2007, [www.marforpac.marines.mil/DesktopModules/ArticleCS/Print.aspx?PortalId=21&ModuleId=50781&Article=530183](http://www.marforpac.marines.mil/DesktopModules/ArticleCS/Print.aspx?PortalId=21&ModuleId=50781&Article=530183).

## 2. International Military Education and Training Program

The IMET program is a relatively low-cost, high-yielding program that invests in long-term human capital. According to the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), the U.S. secretary of state determines which countries are eligible to participate, while the secretary of defense executes the IMET program.<sup>146</sup> Since its inception in 1976, IMET has trained future foreign leaders who immersed themselves in American culture and were invited to bring their immediate family members with them to the United States. During the program, IMET students establish rapport with U.S. military and other international officers both in and out of the classroom. These future leaders build relationships and mutual trust while developing their professional military education. Guest countries receive IMET funding appropriated annually by the U.S. Congress.

Thailand is a leading nation to benefit from IMET. The United States established the IMET program with Thailand in 1952, and the first Thai students began training in the same year.<sup>147</sup> Prior to the 2006 coup, Thailand was the largest recipient of IMET funding in the world, averaging approximately \$2.5 million per year.<sup>148</sup> Thai IMET alumni return to Thailand and use U.S. doctrine and training manuals to professionalize their military. These officers are sought after by senior military leaders to act as advisors on matters regarding U.S.-Thailand security cooperation.

Since the program's inception, tens of thousands of Thai military officers have been trained. Most officers serve a full 30-year career and advance to top leadership positions in Thailand. According to a RAND case study, approximately 5 percent of the

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<sup>146</sup> Prashanth Parameswaran, "Confirmed: U.S. Will Hold 2016 Cobra Gold Military Exercises in Thailand," *Diplomat* (13 June 2015), [www.thediplomat.com/2015/06/us-moves-ahead-with-2016-cobra-gold-military-exercises-in-thailand/?allpages=yes&print=yes](http://www.thediplomat.com/2015/06/us-moves-ahead-with-2016-cobra-gold-military-exercises-in-thailand/?allpages=yes&print=yes).

<sup>147</sup> Jennifer Taw, "Thailand and the Philippines: Case Studies in U.S. IMET Training and Its Role in Internal Defense and Development," *RAND Corporation* (1994): 22, [www.rand.org/pubs/monograph\\_reports/MR159.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR159.html).

<sup>148</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2007), 11, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

total Royal Thai armed forces received training in the United States under IMET.<sup>149</sup> Although 5 percent may appear small, it is impressive because IMET alumni return to assume approximately half the key positions, such as those focused on basic training, professional military education, policy development, and command. RAND concludes that the majority of IMET-trained Royal Thai officers elevate to top leadership positions within Thailand's military.<sup>150</sup>

Thailand's 2006 coup forced the U.S. government to suspend IMET funding, but the United States kept the program available to Thailand through other means. IMET funding falls under the military assistance that was suspended following the coup; however, viewing it only through a monetary lens is problematic. While the relationship between the United States and Thailand did change following the coup because IMET funding was suspended, the United States kept its doors open to Thailand for self-funding its officers' participation and by finding other U.S. appropriations.

When the U.S. State Department announced the suspension of IMET funding in accordance with Section 508 of the Foreign Operations Appropriations Act, the United States continued to allow Thailand to send students.<sup>151</sup> Royal Thai Military officers who were already approved with presuspension funding were allowed to continue their training; however, Thailand had to pay for new students to attend IMET. Institutions such as the Naval Postgraduate School continued to admit Thai students who met the minimum requirements for training. The United States was legally mandated by Congress to suspend IMET funding but temporarily used other U.S. and Thai funds to continue to professionalize the Royal Thai Military.

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<sup>149</sup> Taw, "Thailand and the Philippines: Case Studies in U.S. IMET Training and Its Role in Internal Defense and Development," *RAND Corporation* (1994): 23–26, [www.rand.org/pubs/monograph\\_reports/MR159.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR159.html).

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008), 7, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

### 3. Foreign Military Sales

Access to FMS has allowed Thailand to modernize its military with the world's best weapons, services, and training. In 2003, the United States elevated Thailand's status to a major non-NATO ally, granting it even greater access to U.S. military assistance, such as U.S. foreign aid and financing for weapons purchase. According to DSCA, the FMS program is a U.S. foreign policy security assistance tool that is authorized by the Arms Export Control Act (AECA).<sup>152</sup> Under this act, the U.S. government is authorized to grant, sell, or finance defense equipment and services to foreign countries when the president finds that doing so will enhance security interests and promote stability.<sup>153</sup> Further, the United States offers foreign military financing (FMF) that allows eligible states grants or low-cost financing to purchase FMS. The secretary of state determines which countries are granted access, and the secretary of defense executes the program. The official agreement allows the foreign country to use its own funds to purchase FMS or to obtain U.S. military grants or aid at a low interest rate guaranteed through FMF.<sup>154</sup> Thailand has had access to both FMS and FMF, allowing it to modernize the Royal Thai Military with compatible U.S. equipment.

The United States offers another option to foreign governments trying to professionalize and modernize their militaries on a budget. Under FMS, defense trade and arms transfer can also transpire through the excess defense articles (EDA) program. The program allows foreign governments to obtain EDA as a grant or at a reduced cost based on the condition of the equipment. Equipment conditions range from new to used but must be in working condition. Under the EDA program, for instance, Thailand has

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<sup>152</sup> "Foreign Military Sales (FMS)," Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 15 January 2016, [www.dsca.mil/programs/foreign-military-sales-fms](http://www.dsca.mil/programs/foreign-military-sales-fms).

<sup>153</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2007), 3, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008), 9, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf> 9.

<sup>154</sup> "Foreign Military Financing (FMF)."

received naval ships and aircraft with which to modernize its military.<sup>155</sup> Countries on a budget consider the EDA program an important opportunity. The DSCA coordinates with the DOD and facilitates the approval of requests to recipient states.<sup>156</sup> Additionally, according to Section 516 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, EDA also may be sold as part of the FMS program under the AECA. Thailand's security-cooperation status with the United States qualifies it for all FMS, FMF, and EDA programs.

Regarding military sales, U.S. leaders responded in token fashion to Thailand's 2006 coup by expressing official displeasure while still trying to maintain support. On 28 September 2006, the State Department announced the suspension of military assistance under Section 508 of the Foreign Operations Appropriations Act (P.L. 109–102).<sup>157</sup> According to the State Department, the United States suspended a total of \$29 million in security aid. This included the suspension of grants and FMF, which prevented Thailand from using U.S. financing. However, and quite importantly, these actions did not prevent Thailand from purchasing weapons and equipment from the United States through FMS or the EDA program. During the FMF suspension, Thailand continued to purchase FMS and EDA with Thai money.

Thailand was never without options to secure weapons either from the United States or from China, which was willing to fill the void imposed by the State Department. Thailand's first option was to continue to purchase weapons from the United States, but it could also obtain granted and purchased defense equipment from China. The doors had been opened earlier. Sino-Thai military relations can be traced back to the 1980s when China strengthened Thailand's military capabilities by granting artillery, antiaircraft, antitank, and tanks against the growing threat from Vietnam during its occupation of Cambodia.<sup>158</sup> Unlike the United States, China refused to condemn Thailand's 2006 coup,

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<sup>155</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008), 10, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

<sup>156</sup> "Excess Defense Articles (EDA)," Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 15 January 2016, [www.dsca.mil/programs/excess-defense-articles-eda](http://www.dsca.mil/programs/excess-defense-articles-eda).

<sup>157</sup> Taw, "Thailand and the Philippines," 23–26.

<sup>158</sup> Michael R. Chambers, "'The Chinese and the Thais Are Brothers': The Evolution of the Sino-Thai Friendship," *Journal of Contemporary China* 14, no. 45 (2005): 616.

believing it to be an internal affair. China not only continued to sell weapons and equipment to Thailand but also included a \$49 million security package.<sup>159</sup> Before and after the coup, Thailand could purchase weapons from both the United States and China, and the only change was U.S. security funding and financing.

After elections in late 2007, about 14 months after the coup, the Thai government returned to elected civilian control. On 6 February 2008, U.S. deputy secretary of state John Negroponte assured Congress that Thailand had restored democracy, and the United States lifted legal restrictions on security aid.<sup>160</sup> Security cooperation funding resumed for IMET, FMF, and the Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative (GPOI). However, the long-term ramifications of the FMF suspension are still developing as Thailand continues to purchase weapons and equipment from other countries at rates higher than it did before FMF was temporarily suspended.<sup>161</sup>

#### **4. International Law Enforcement Academy Bangkok (Law Enforcement Cooperation)**

The ILEA began as a means to protect U.S. national interests abroad and support emerging democracies.<sup>162</sup> The first ILEA was established in Budapest in 1995. In 1996, the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok recommended establishing an ILEA to enhance regional security cooperation throughout Asia.<sup>163</sup> Two years later, the United States and Thailand

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<sup>159</sup> Richard S. Ehrlich, "China Muscling U.S. Aside in Thailand," *Washington Times*, 31 July 2011, [www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/jul/31/china-muscling-us-aside-in-thailand/print/](http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/jul/31/china-muscling-us-aside-in-thailand/print/); Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008), 14–15, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

<sup>160</sup> "Foreign Military Financing (FMF)."

<sup>161</sup> Gabriel Dominguez, "Why Thailand Is Boosting Ties with Russia and China," in *Deutsche Welle* (Germany: Deutsche Welle, 4 August 2015) <http://www.dw.com/en/why-thailand-is-boosting-ties-with-russia-and-china/a-18367018>; Aubrey Belford, "Junta-Ruled Thailand Flirts with Russia as U.S. Ties Cool," *Reuters*, (20 February 2016), [www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-russia-idUSKCN0VT0DG](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-russia-idUSKCN0VT0DG); Wyatt Olson, "China Lurks as U.S. Ties with Thailand Splinter, Military Experts Say," *Stars and Stripes*, 11 April 2015, [www.stripes.com/news/china-lurks-as-us-ties-with-thailand-splinter-military-experts-say-1.339510](http://www.stripes.com/news/china-lurks-as-us-ties-with-thailand-splinter-military-experts-say-1.339510); Richard S. Ehrlich, "Thailand Nears \$1 Billion Submarine Deal with China Despite Exclusive U.S. Military Training," *Special to The Washington Times*, 7 July 2015, [www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/jul/7/thailand-nears-1-billion-submarine-deal-with-china/?page=all](http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/jul/7/thailand-nears-1-billion-submarine-deal-with-china/?page=all).

<sup>162</sup> "ILEA Bangkok," U.S. Department of State, 15 December 2015, [www.state.gov/j/inl/c/crime/ilea/c11280.htm](http://www.state.gov/j/inl/c/crime/ilea/c11280.htm); "ILEA Statement of Purpose," U.S. Department of State, 15 December 2015, <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/c/crime/ilea/c11242.htm>.

<sup>163</sup> "ILEA Bangkok."



signed a bilateral agreement and partnered to provide training to combat drug trafficking and related transnational crimes that plague the region.<sup>164</sup> The ILEA in Bangkok represents one of four regional academies and the only one in Asia that covers Southeast Asia and China.

The program's objectives are to combat international drug trafficking, international crimes, and terrorism through international cooperation.<sup>165</sup> According to the State Department, "The ILEA's mission is to buttress democratic governance through the rule of law; enhance the functioning of free markets through improved legislation and law enforcement; and increase social, political, and economic stability by combating narcotics trafficking and crime."<sup>166</sup> The academy provides training and assistance designed by U.S. government agencies in partnership with host nation agencies that enhance security cooperation and support participating nations in adopting international law enforcement standards.

U.S. agency and Thai agency officials jointly designed the structure and organization of the ILEA in Bangkok. Thailand and the U.S. Embassy provide the instructors and logistical support. For example, representatives from U.S. agencies include those drawn from the State Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS); Thailand provides equivalent representatives from agencies such as the Royal Thai Police and the Thai Office of the Narcotics Control Board.<sup>167</sup> The DEA is the lead agency responsible for providing structure and program support for the academy in Bangkok. Thailand provides key personnel to positions such as the executive director, deputy

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> "ILEA Statement of Purpose."

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2005), 9–10, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2006), 10, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008), 11, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

executive director, and the chiefs of each subsection. The U.S. Department of State finances the majority of training through the Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL), and other U.S. government agencies or foreign governments can contribute to fund specialized courses.<sup>168</sup>

ILEA courses are designed to meet specific needs of participating countries, but the U.S. government evaluates those needs as they relate to U.S. interests. States wishing to participate must seek nomination through the U.S. Embassy in their country and must meet U.S. requirements. For instance, foreign intelligence officers and states that are known for human rights violations are excluded from participation. While other countries such as Japan, Holland, Australia, and Hong Kong also contribute to the multinational staff of trainers, the United States maintains greater influence on the ILEA in Bangkok because it is the lead agent and gatekeeper for international participation.

ILEA Bangkok remained resilient after the 2006 coup. Law enforcement cooperation affects a range of security-related issues, and both the United States and Thailand categorized transnational crimes as threats to national security, especially from international terrorism but also from unexpected shifts in regional balances of power.<sup>169</sup> These threats include trafficking in narcotics and arms, human trafficking, money laundering, and violations of international and domestic law enforcement. The academy in Bangkok provides law enforcement training to Southeast Asian nations to combat transnational crimes and promotes international law enforcement security cooperation. Although the United States suspended some forms of security aid to Thailand after the 2006 coup, programs that were considered vital to U.S. interests, such as ILEA, continued.

### **C. DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS**

Diplomatic relations between the United States and Thailand have been sustained for almost two centuries. In the early 19th century, Asia was a desirable trading

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<sup>168</sup> “ILEA Bangkok.”

<sup>169</sup> Prashanth Parameswaran, “A Surge in Southeast Asian Transnational Crime?,” *Diplomat* (2 January 2015), <http://thediplomat.com/2015/01/a-surge-in-southeast-asian-transnational-crime/>.

destination for the West. In the 1820s, President Andrew Jackson sent the first American envoy to Siam led by Edmund Roberts, who was granted access by King Nang Klao, Rama III. In 1833, the two countries agreed to the first diplomatic act with the Treaty of Amity and Commerce. While neighboring countries were being colonized, King Mongkut, Rama IV, modernized the Kingdom's bureaucracy and believed that opening up Siam's foreign policy to the West was necessary to ensure Siam's survival. In the 1850s, Somdet Chao Phraya Si Suriyawong became the leading minister to King Mongkut and was responsible for concluding treaties with England and the United States.<sup>170</sup> In 1856, the United States appointed the first American consul, Reverend Stephen Mattoon, in Siam and signed the Harris Treaty, which was an update to the Treaty of Amity.<sup>171</sup> These treaties not only strengthened the two countries' friendship, but they also helped Thailand avoid colonization.

Diplomacy continued to advance the friendship in the second half of the century. As a token of good will, King Mongkut sent a sword and photograph and offered elephants to President James Buchanan in 1861.<sup>172</sup> After recovering from the American Civil War, the United States formalized legation in 1882, opening full diplomatic relations with the Kingdom and appointed John A. Halderman as the first American consul general.<sup>173</sup> Siam reciprocated by appointing Prince Prisdang Jumsai, who earned his advanced degree in London, as the first minister to the United States, England, and ten other European countries. In 1884, President Chester A. Arthur received the first official diplomat, Prince Nares Warariddhi, appointed to the United States and the United Kingdom. This was the first of many official royal visits by Siam leading up to WWII.

The challenges of WWII tested and catapulted U.S.-Thailand diplomatic relations to a new level. After attacking Pearl Harbor in 1941, Japan invaded Thailand; to avoid being colonized, Thailand bandwagoned by joining forces with Japan. When prime

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<sup>170</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online* s. v. "Somdet Chao Phraya Si Suriyawong," accessed 12 January 2016, [www.britannica.com/biography/Somdet-Chao-Phraya-Si-Suriyawong](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Somdet-Chao-Phraya-Si-Suriyawong).

<sup>171</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Timeline of U.S.-Thai Relations."

<sup>172</sup> "The National Archives to Display King of Siam Letter to U.S. President," National Archives, September 23, 1999, [www.archives.gov/press/press-releases/1999/nr99-122.html](http://www.archives.gov/press/press-releases/1999/nr99-122.html).

<sup>173</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Timeline of U.S.-Thai Relations."

minister Field Marshal Phibun signed a defense pact with Japan and declared war against the United States, the Thai ambassador Seni Pramoj refused to deliver the declaration. Dr. Wichitwong Na Ponphet, a fellow of the Royal Institute, explained how a large group of Thai rebels who lived in Thailand, the United States, and Great Britain formed the Free Thai Movement and helped the Allies.<sup>174</sup> As a result, the United States never declared war against Thailand and would later accept Thailand's Peace Proclamation after the war. U.S. leaders recognized that Thailand was under duress when agreeing to Japan's demands. The United States vouched for Thailand and convinced other allied nations to refrain from treating the Thais as enemy combatants.<sup>175</sup> Thailand was able to preserve its sovereignty and did not have to disarm and surrender to the Allies. This development had a profound effect on Thailand's leadership and produced increasing cooperation with the United States in the second half of the 20th century.

U.S.-Thailand diplomatic relations accelerated significantly after WWII. In 1947, the United States elevated the legation office in Bangkok to an embassy and appointed Ambassador Edwin F. Stanton.<sup>176</sup> In the 1950s, both countries signed several agreements including the notable Manila Pact, which formalized their alliance. Establishments emerged in and around the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok, such as the JUSMAG, the American Chamber of Commerce, and ILEA. Diplomacy in the second half of the century was further marked by increased visits from both countries' leaders, such as King Bhumibol, Rama IX, Queen Sirikit, the crown prince and princesses, prime ministers, presidents, first ladies, and the secretaries of state and defense. Such high-level visits continued well into the 2000s.

In the 2000s, American and Thai leaders continued to enhance diplomacy by exchanging visits and signing agreements. Leaders of both countries made several joint

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<sup>174</sup> Asavin Chintakananda, "Thailand's Peace Declaration Day: Why Was Thailand Not Defeated in World War II?," *Energy Reservation Foundation of Thailand* (16 August 2009), [www.teamgroup.co.th/downloads/articles/article-052610-1-en.pdf](http://www.teamgroup.co.th/downloads/articles/article-052610-1-en.pdf).

<sup>175</sup> Kerdphol, "Thai-American Friendship," 166.

<sup>176</sup> "The Embassy," Royal Thai Embassy, Washington DC, 15 January 2016, <http://thaiembdc.org/about-the-embassy/the-embassy/>; U.S. Department of State, "Timeline of U.S.-Thai Relations."

statements from 2001 to 2005.<sup>177</sup> In December 2001, President Bush and Prime Minister Thaksin reaffirmed their countries' alliance and pledged to continue to strengthen cooperation. They exchanged visits in 2003 and concluded the year by upgrading Thailand's status to major non-NATO ally. The 2005 joint statement highlighted bilateral cooperation in terms of both regional and global interests, with both leaders agreeing on the potential for greater cooperation.<sup>178</sup> In all three meetings, President Bush and Prime Minister Thaksin acknowledged the nations' history of cooperation against terrorism and transnational crimes. They agreed to expand trade and investment ties that would be mutually beneficial and high-level visits that would reinforce an already friendly relationship.

U.S.-Thailand relations were only temporarily disrupted by Thailand's coup. In December 2006, only three months after the coup, former president George H. W. Bush and Mrs. Barbara Bush visited Thailand and pledged to continue support for relief efforts from the devastating tsunami that had occurred one year prior. Immediately following Thailand's return to democracy in 2008, executive visits recommenced from leaders such as assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs Ambassador Christopher Hill; secretary of defense Robert M. Gates; deputy assistant secretary of state for professional and cultural exchanges Alina L. Romanowski; and President Bush.<sup>179</sup>

The U.S. government faced the dilemma of trying to maintain its relationship with Thailand while still signaling disappointment by announcing sanctions. A Congressional Research Service (CRS) report defines sanction as, "any measure or action of a diplomatic, economic, or military nature taken by a nation or a group of nations to coerce . . . [a state] to comply with expected conduct or behavior."<sup>180</sup> The U.S. State Department

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<sup>177</sup> "Joint Statement between the United States of America and the Kingdom of Thailand," White House Office of the Press Secretary, 11 June 2003, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eap/rls/ot/21627.htm>; "Joint Statement between President Bush and Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra," U.S. Department of State, White House Office of the Press Secretary, September 19, 2005, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2005/53750.htm>.

<sup>178</sup> U. S. Department of State, "Joint Statement between President Bush and Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra."

<sup>179</sup> U. S. Department of State, "Timeline of U.S.-Thai Relations."

<sup>180</sup> Michael F. Martin, *U.S. Sanctions on Burma* (CRS Report No. R41336) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012), 1, <https://www.fas.org/sfp/crs/row/R41336.pdf>.

applied sanctions by suspending assistance programs under Section 508 of the Foreign Operations Appropriations Act (P.L. 109–102) and funds for operations appropriated under Section 1206 of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2006.<sup>181</sup> As noted earlier, this decision translated to suspensions of \$29 million allocated to Thailand for FMF for defense procurement, IMET for training to professionalize the Thai military, GPOI programs, and counterterrorism operations. Most analysts considered this U.S. response relatively mild, and this judgment appears valid when one considers the full spectrum of responses the U.S. government could have taken.<sup>182</sup>

U.S. diplomacy against Cuba, following its coup and later revolution, is the most extreme example of reactions the government could have taken against Thailand. After Fidel Castro overtook President Fulgencio Batista, hiked tariffs on U.S. imports, and established trade with the Soviet Union, President Dwight D. Eisenhower responded by cutting off diplomatic relations with Cuba and by imposing a trade embargo in 1960. In 1962, President John F. Kennedy imposed a full economic embargo on Cuba, restricting travel and trade estimated at over \$1.1 trillion.<sup>183</sup> In 1996, after Cuba shot down two U.S. aircraft, President William J. Clinton passed the Helms-Burton Act, intensifying the embargo by penalizing foreign companies that did business with Cuba.<sup>184</sup> Further, the act stipulated specific conditions that had to be met before sanctions could be lifted. The U.S. diplomatic response against Cuba represents the longest and most extreme political and

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<sup>181</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008), 7–8, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.; Chanlett-Avery, Dolven, and Mackey, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2015), 3, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Tanvi Pate, “Crisis in Thailand-IV: Analysing ASEAN, U.S., UN and EU Responses by Tanvi Pate,” *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies* (22 June 2010), [www.ipcs.org/print\\_article-details.php?recNo=3188](http://www.ipcs.org/print_article-details.php?recNo=3188); Thitinan Pongsudhirak, “Thitinan Pongsudhirak: Global Partners Balance Interests, Values Post-Coup,” *Nikkei Asian Review* (21 May 2015), [www.asia.nikkei.com/magazine/20150521-GENERAL-MALAISE/On-the-Cover/Thitinan-Pongsudhirak-Global-partners-balance-interests-values-post-coup](http://www.asia.nikkei.com/magazine/20150521-GENERAL-MALAISE/On-the-Cover/Thitinan-Pongsudhirak-Global-partners-balance-interests-values-post-coup).

<sup>183</sup> “Timeline: U.S.-Cuba Relations,” *Council on Foreign Relations* (15 February 2016), [www.cfr.org/cuba/timeline-us-cuba-relations/p32817](http://www.cfr.org/cuba/timeline-us-cuba-relations/p32817).

<sup>184</sup> The Libertad Act: Implementation and International Law : Hearing before the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere and Peace Corps Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 104th Congress, Second Session, July 30, 1996; Claire Suddath, “A Brief History of U.S.-Cuba Relations,” *Time*, April 15, 2009, [www.content.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,1891359,00.html](http://www.content.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,1891359,00.html).

economic measures taken to coerce a state to comply with U.S. demands. Granted, Cuba was an enemy of the United States, whereas Thailand is an ally; but this example serves to illustrate what diplomatic actions are possible.

Burma represents a somewhat closer comparison to Thailand in that it has never been an enemy of the United States. In this case, the U.S. government officially refers to the country as *Burma* and not *Myanmar* because it refuses to recognize the abusive military regime that changed the name after disallowing elected politicians to take office after the National League for Democracy's landslide victory at the polls in 1990. The rationale has been that using the name given by the junta would imply legitimacy.<sup>185</sup> Unlike U.S.-Thailand relations, U.S.-Burma relations have steadily declined since WWII. Burma's relationship with the United States began to decline due to opposing alliances with the Kuomintang (KMT) guerrillas from China, a 1962 coup and the resulting military government under the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) that favored China, and extreme human rights violations against Burmese citizens.<sup>186</sup> Yet, despite all this, the United States still accepted Burma, granted it most-favored nation status, supported international assistance for development, and sanctioned IMET program funding up to 1988.<sup>187</sup> In August of that year, a peaceful protest against the military government turned bloody when soldiers attempted to put down demonstrations. The U.S. Senate and House immediately condemned the killings and supported a rapid return to democracy. President Ronald Reagan applied greater pressure by suspending all U.S. aid and implementing substantial sanctions.

The U.S. response to Thailand's 2006 military coup pales in comparison to sanctions against Burma's military government. From 1990 to 2012, the U.S. government

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<sup>185</sup> Max Fisher, "Why It's Such a Big Deal That Obama Said 'Myanmar' Rather Than Burma," *The Washington Post*, November 19, 2012, [www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2012/11/19/why-its-such-a-big-deal-that-obama-said-myanmar-rather-than-burma/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2012/11/19/why-its-such-a-big-deal-that-obama-said-myanmar-rather-than-burma/); Martin, *U.S. Sanctions on Burma* (CRS Report No. R41336) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012), 1, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41336.pdf>; Michael F. Martin, *U.S. Policy Towards Burma: Issues for the 113th Congress* (CRS Report No. R43035) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2013), 1–3, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43035.pdf>; Xu and Albert, "Understanding Myanmar."

<sup>186</sup> Kenton Clymer, "The United States and the Guomindang (KMT) Forces in Burma, 1949–1954: A Diplomatic Disaster," *The Chinese Historical Review* 21, no. 1 (2014): 24–44.

<sup>187</sup> Martin, *U.S. Sanctions on Burma* (CRS Report No. R41336) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012), 11, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41336.pdf>.

imposed sanctions comprising six laws and five presidential executive orders.<sup>188</sup> Economic sanctions included withholding U.S. contributions to international programs for Burma, prohibiting all importation of goods, and banning U.S. investments in Burma. Additionally, Burma's military aid suspensions included the restriction of all weapons sales, not just financing. Diplomatic sanctions included suspending preferential treatment, restricting travel to and from Burma, banning the visas of certain Burmese nationals, and opposing loans to Burma by international financial institutions. In contrast, the U.S. government imposed only the minimum legally mandated suspension of military aid against Thailand after Thailand's military leaders unseated the Kingdom's elected government, suggesting that Thailand was shown preferential treatment.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Thailand's 2006 coup appeared to somewhat delay expanding relations with the United States but produced insignificant deviations overall. Economically, bilateral economic relations experienced a very slight downturn, but that development was short lived. The indefinite suspension of free trade negotiations by both sides—first at Thailand's request earlier in 2006 when it faced internal unrest and then by the United States immediately following the coup—was the most significant negative impact, given that both countries have continued to sign FTAs with other countries but not each other. Thailand secured agreements with Japan, South Korea, India, Australia, and New Zealand between 2007 and 2010.<sup>189</sup> During the same period, the United States completed FTAs with Oman, Peru, and Jordan.<sup>190</sup> Despite lacking a formal FTA, bilateral trade remained strong and continued to rise gradually. Although FDI dipped in 2006, the underlying cause remains unclear. Overall, economic relations recovered quickly and, with the exception of FTAs, continued on a positive trend until the global financial crisis of 2008.

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 1–4.

<sup>189</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2007), 14, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Asian Development Bank, “By Country/Economy—Free Trade Agreements.”

<sup>190</sup> “Free Trade Agreements,” Office of the United States Trade Representative, 15 January 2016, <https://ustr.gov/trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements>.



Despite these temporary and relatively minor economic setbacks, security cooperation remained strong. The U.S. Congress tried to pressure the Thai government through military aid sanctions. U.S. funding for Thai IMET students was immediately suspended along with FMF for appropriation of weapons and equipment; however, Thailand was allowed to continue participating in both IMET and FMS programs by using Thai government funds. Suspension of military aid sounds severe, but what really happened was Thailand had to pay its own way for the two programs for a short period. Cobra Gold continued uninterrupted, and the government's rhetoric of reducing U.S. military participants was the result of prioritizing limited troop strength toward active conflict zones. Furthermore, security cooperation continued in other areas of high importance to the global war on terrorism, such as transnational crime. Full support and financing remained intact for ILEA. Overall, security cooperation remained firm, and slight changes were insignificant to the partnership.

Diplomatically, the United States continued to cooperate and pledge support for Thailand. The U.S. response to the 2006 coup appeared calculated and relatively mild when considering the available tools of diplomacy: economic blockades, reduced aid, termination of agreements, the recall of ambassadors, and strong condemnation of actions unilaterally or the seeking of UN Security Council action. Instead, the State Department imposed the legally mandated suspension of military aid and elected to refrain from disengagement and harsh rhetoric. The absence of action, such as restricting travel, recalling the U.S. ambassador and citizens, or terminating Thailand's non-NATO status, indicates U.S. leaders respected and desired to continue cultivating the relationship. Further, instead of condemning the coup or making a formal statement from the United States, former president George H. W. Bush went to Thailand to pledge support for tsunami recovery efforts just months after the coup. His visit suggests two things: first that the United States was not afraid of the interim military government, and second that the United States remains committed to Thailand.

### **III. 2014 COUP**

Led by a new administration in 2009, the United States shifted focus to Asia and continued to rely on allies, such as Thailand, to help advance its national interests in the Asia-Pacific region. In 2010, President Obama formalized the rebalance to Asia in his national security strategy.<sup>191</sup> According to the strategy, U.S. allies in Asia are paramount to the security and prosperity of the region. The United States and Thailand recommitted their efforts to economic, military, and diplomatic cooperation in a joint press statement between President Obama and Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra.<sup>192</sup> Alliance reforms with Thailand, such as the 2012 Joint Vision Statement, shifted away from combating communism and focused on regional security through bilateral and multilateral interoperability and relationship building. The alliance appeared on a positive course but was interrupted by Thailand's 2014 coup. Currently, Thailand claims to be navigating back to democracy, and the U.S. response is still developing; however, current trends suggest the relationship is on a slight detour but still navigating to the same destination.

#### **A. ECONOMIC RELATIONS**

The U.S.-Thailand economic relationship maintains course despite setbacks, most of which are not the result of U.S. sanctions pressuring Thailand to return to democracy. With the second largest economy in Southeast Asia, Thailand is a well-developed, upper-middle-income market, making it attractive for trade and investment. Thailand continues to maintain long-held policies supporting an open market with emphasis on exports and foreign investment. Although a U.S.-Thailand FTA remains suspended, the United States

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<sup>191</sup> Barack Obama, "National Security Strategy," (2010), [www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss\\_viewer/national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf).

<sup>192</sup> "Joint Press Statement between President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra," news release, November 18, 2012, [www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/11/18/joint-press-statement-between-president-barack-obama-and-prime-minister-](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/11/18/joint-press-statement-between-president-barack-obama-and-prime-minister-).

continues to be one of Thailand's top trading and investing partners.<sup>193</sup> The Kingdom's steady economic growth, ease of doing business, and regional competitiveness have maintained investor confidence.<sup>194</sup> This section describes the significance of the FTAs, bilateral trade, and FDIs, showing that U.S.-Thailand economic relations have not been significantly affected by the 2014 coup.

### **1. Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**

The bilateral FTA never materialized and has remained suspended at Thailand's request since shortly before the 2006 coup. Despite this, both countries have continued to diversify trade with one another and other trading partners and to maintain a steady rise in overall bilateral trade.<sup>195</sup> While neither side has reengaged bilateral negotiations, each has aggressively pursued FTAs with other countries. Currently, the United States has 20 FTAs in effect, and Thailand has 12 with another eight under negotiations.<sup>196</sup> For Thailand, this strategy supports its export-oriented economy, as depicted in Figure 5, which illustrates Thailand's GDP growth from 2006 to 2014. The data were drawn from the Trading Economics' online database and is the most current information available in the first quarter of calendar year 2016. Since recovering from the 2006 coup and 2008 global financial crisis, Thailand's GDP has nearly doubled in the past eight years, growing from \$222 billion in 2006 to \$405 billion in 2014. This increase indicates that the Kingdom's economic growth and trade relations have remained resilient despite the halted bilateral trade agreement with the United States, one of its most important trade partners. Indefinite suspension of the U.S.-Thailand FTA does not appear to have had a negative impact on Thailand's economic growth or trade relations with the United States.

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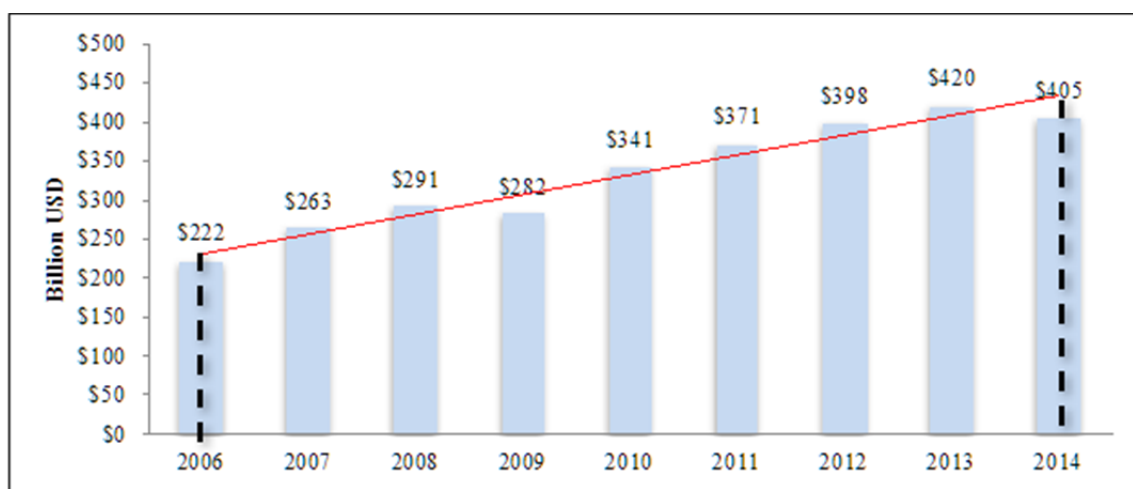
<sup>193</sup> Chanlett-Avery, Dolven, and Mackey, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2015), 9–10, <https://www.fas.org/sfp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Alexander Simones, "Trade Balance of Thailand to the United States," The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 15 January 2016, [www.atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/line/hs92/show/tha/usa/all/2000.2010/](http://www.atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/line/hs92/show/tha/usa/all/2000.2010/).

<sup>194</sup> "Thailand," Coface, [www.coface.com/Economic-Studies-and-Country-Risks/Thailand](http://www.coface.com/Economic-Studies-and-Country-Risks/Thailand); "Doing Business in Thailand," Embassy of the United States, 7 March 2016, [www.export.gov/thailand/doingbusiness/index.asp](http://www.export.gov/thailand/doingbusiness/index.asp); "2015 Investment Climate Statement—Thailand," U.S. Department of State, 15 May 2015, [www.state.gov/e/eb/rls/othr/ics/2015/241763.htm](http://www.state.gov/e/eb/rls/othr/ics/2015/241763.htm).

<sup>195</sup> Simones, "Trade Balance of Thailand to the United States."

<sup>196</sup> "Free Trade Agreements"; Asian Development Bank, "By Country/Economy—Free Trade Agreements."

Figure 5. Thailand Gross Domestic Product (GDP) 2006–2014<sup>197</sup>



The dashed bars represent the 2006 and 2014 coups.

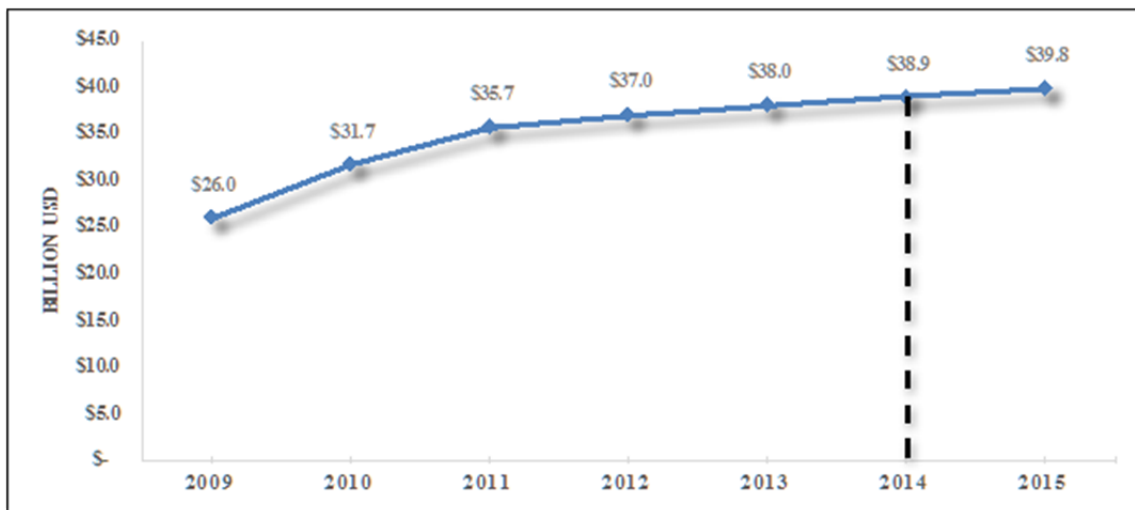
## 2. Bilateral Trade

Bilateral trade relations between the United States and Thailand continued to grow at a slow but steady pace. Using data drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau’s online database, from 2009 to 2014, U.S.-Thailand bilateral trade grew from \$26 billion to \$38.9 billion (see Figure 6). Additionally, Figure 7 demonstrates that the United States remained among Thailand’s top three bilateral trading partners, behind China and Japan. To show the most reliable figures available, data for Figure 7 were drawn and compared across multiple sources, including the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, the U.S. Census Bureau, and Thailand’s Ministry of Commerce online database. Although China surpassed the United States to become Thailand’s top bilateral trading partner in 2010, the United States continued to be Thailand’s number one export destination.<sup>198</sup> Trade relations appear to be on an increasingly positive course.

<sup>197</sup> Adapted from Trading Economics, 15 January 2016, [www.tradingeconomics.com/thailand/gdp](http://www.tradingeconomics.com/thailand/gdp).

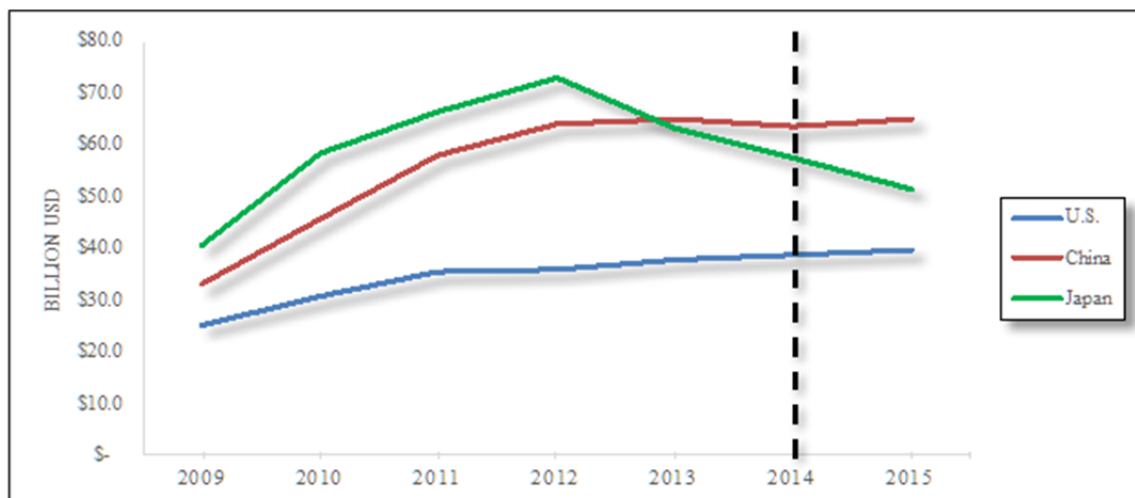
<sup>198</sup> Chanlett-Avery, Dolven, and Mackey, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2015), 11, <https://www.fas.org/sfp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Daniel Workman, “Thailand’s Top Import Partners,” (23 February 2016), [www.worldstopexports.com/thailands-top-import-partners/](http://www.worldstopexports.com/thailands-top-import-partners/).

Figure 6. U.S.-Thailand Bilateral Trade 2009–2015<sup>199</sup>



The dashed bar represents the 2014 coup.

Figure 7. Thailand's Bilateral Trade with Top Partners, 2009–2015<sup>200</sup>



The dashed bar represents the 2014 coup.

Thailand's economy relies heavily on its export-oriented market, and the United States remains a reliable and steadily growing export destination. Thailand's 2014 coup

<sup>199</sup> Adapted from the U.S. Census Bureau, Trade in Goods with Thailand, 12 December 2015, [www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5490.html](http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5490.html).

<sup>200</sup> Adapted from Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), 19 February 2016, [http://statistics.apec.org/index.php/bilateral\\_linkage/bld\\_result/40](http://statistics.apec.org/index.php/bilateral_linkage/bld_result/40); the U.S. Census Bureau, Trade in Goods with Thailand, 12 December 2015, [www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5490.html](http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5490.html); and Ministry of Commerce, 15 January 2016, [www2.ops3.moc.go.th](http://www2.ops3.moc.go.th).

does not seem to have significantly impacted bilateral trade relations. In 2015, the United States remained Thailand's top trade partner in terms of export, purchasing \$23.7 billion in goods, which equates to 11.2 percent of Thailand's total exports.<sup>201</sup> China was a close second at \$23.3 billion, totaling 11.1 percent of Thailand's total exports.<sup>202</sup> The majority of Thailand's exports to the United States are in the automobile and computer parts industries.<sup>203</sup> The United States could buy similar products from other markets but continues trade with Thailand.

### **3. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)**

Thailand's well-developed infrastructure makes it a competitive and desirable investment destination. Over the past decade, U.S. FDI in Thailand has ranged from a low of -\$199 million to a high of \$3.97 billion, suggesting the wide fluctuations seen in Figure 8 may be normal. After posting negative investment of -\$44 million in 2009, an outcome most likely related to the global financial crisis that started in the United States in 2008, U.S. companies resumed positive investment levels in Thailand, posting \$1.43 billion in 2010. Indeed, U.S. FDI in Thailand posted positive inflows each year between 2010 and 2014, hitting their peak of \$3.97 billion in 2012. In 2011, FDI remained positive, despite ongoing political turmoil and Thailand's suffering one of its worst floods in history, which hit the economically vibrant central Thailand and Bangkok regions most heavily.<sup>204</sup>

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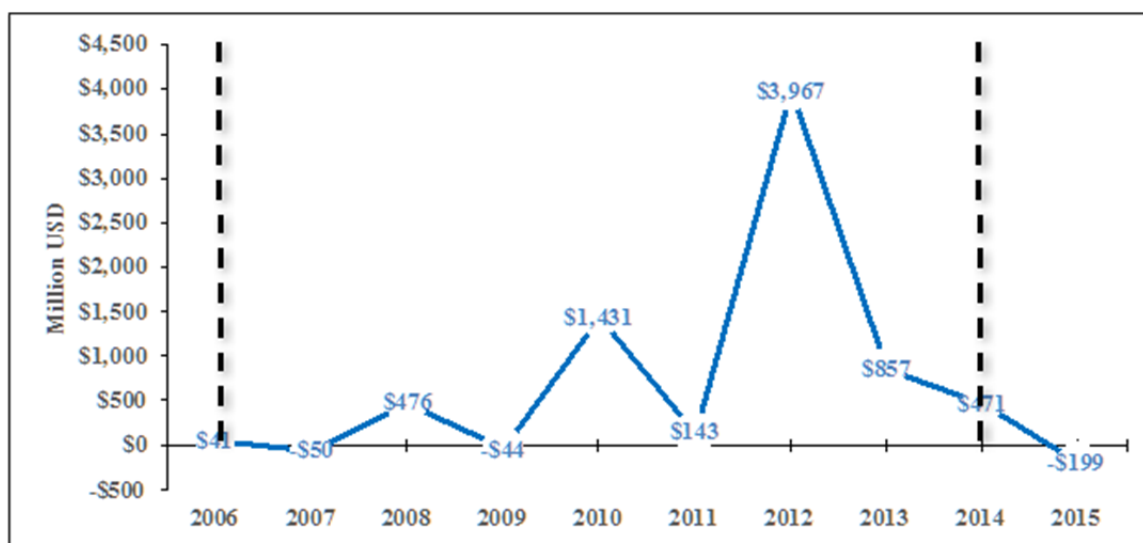
<sup>201</sup> Workman, "Thailand's Top Import Partners"; "Stats APEC: Bilateral Trade and Investment Flows Data for the Asia-Pacific Region," Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, 19 February 2016, [www.statistics.apec.org/index.php/bilateral\\_linkage/bld\\_result/40](http://www.statistics.apec.org/index.php/bilateral_linkage/bld_result/40).

<sup>202</sup> Workman, "Thailand's Top Import Partners."

<sup>203</sup> Alexander Simones, "Products That Thailand Exports to the United States (2013)," 15 February 2016, [www.atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/tree\\_map/hs92/export/tha/usa/show/2013/](http://www.atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/tree_map/hs92/export/tha/usa/show/2013/).

<sup>204</sup> Chingchit, "After Obama's Visit"; Chanlett-Avery and Dolven, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012), 3, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

Figure 8. U.S. Foreign Direct Investment in Thailand between 2006 and 2015<sup>205</sup>



The dashed bar represents the 2014 coup.

Thailand, in cooperation with ASEAN, not only recovered from this natural disaster but emerged as one of the top FDI recipients in the region. Masataka Fujita, head of the Investment Trends and Issues Branch at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), acknowledged that “accelerated regional integration contributes to rising FDI flows in East and Southeast Asia where China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Indonesia, and Thailand are the top five recipients of FDI in the region.”<sup>206</sup> Furthermore, the 2014 UNCTAD report anticipated the level of FDI in Southeast Asia would continue to increase from 2015 to 2017.<sup>207</sup> Predicting if Thailand’s current drought, one of its worst in 20 years, will have a negative impact on FDI from any partner is difficult.<sup>208</sup>

Overall, FDI remains a significant part of Thailand’s economy, but the political turmoil (not the September 2014 coup, per se), has caused some projects to be

<sup>205</sup> Adapted from: The Bank of Thailand, Foreign Direct Investment Classified by Country (US\$), 31 May 2016, <http://www2.bot.or.th/statistics/ReportPage.aspx?reportID=654&language=eng>.

<sup>206</sup> Erich Parpart, “Thailand ‘among Top 5 FDI Recipients,’” *Nation*, 27 July 2014, [www.nationmultimedia.com/business/Thailand-among-top-5-FDI-recipients-30237207.html](http://www.nationmultimedia.com/business/Thailand-among-top-5-FDI-recipients-30237207.html).

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Everton Fox, “Thailand Hit by Its Worst Drought in Decades,” 30 March 2016, [www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/03/thailand-hit-worst-drought-decades-160330102123735.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/03/thailand-hit-worst-drought-decades-160330102123735.html).

suspended.<sup>209</sup> Nevertheless, investors' confidence in Thailand has improved, and Thailand is currently a favorable investment destination for investors from the United States and other countries such as Japan and China. Thailand has continued to improve the ease of doing business in the Kingdom, while making a calculated economic strategy shift. A month after the coup, the World Bank reported that Thailand ranked among the top 30 economies in the world and second among emerging economies in Asia.<sup>210</sup> However, prior to coup, Thailand's Board of Investment (BOI) shifted policy to target the technology sector, encouraging innovation and positioning Thailand as an international trading hub. This new policy became effective in 2015 and resulted in an overall FDI decline in 2015 of approximately 78 percent.<sup>211</sup> As Figure 8 shows, the U.S. FDI in Thailand dropped to -\$199 million, meaning investors took out more money in 2015 than they put in. The BOI made deliberate reforms, shifting away from labor-intensive industries and anticipating a downswing as a result. Advanced technology companies now received maximum benefits including tax exemption, and companies that previously received tax exemptions in other industries were excluded.<sup>212</sup> Thailand's top three FDI contributors all saw a drop in 2015: Japan by 81 percent, China by 21 percent, and the United States by 142 percent.<sup>213</sup> Ultimately, Thailand's investment incentive reforms provide a more compelling explanation for the 2015 decline in FDI than the 2014 coup.

## **B. SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS**

Since the end of WWII, security cooperation between the United States and Thailand continues to be the strongest pillar of the relationship. The U.S. government demonstrated its commitment to the region by increased military exercises and law

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<sup>209</sup> U.S. Department of State, "2015 Investment Climate Statement—Thailand."

<sup>210</sup> "Thailand Further Improves the Ease of Doing Business," World Bank Group, 29 October 2014, [www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2014/10/29/thailand-further-improves-the-ease-of-doing-business-wbg-report-ranks-country-among-top-30-economies-worldwide.print](http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2014/10/29/thailand-further-improves-the-ease-of-doing-business-wbg-report-ranks-country-among-top-30-economies-worldwide.print).

<sup>211</sup> Tamaki Kyojuka, "Thai Economy: Foreign Investment Down 78% Despite Incentives," January 12, 2016, <http://asia.nikkei.com/Politics-Economy/Economy/Foreign-investment-down-78-despite-incentives>; Jon Fernquest, "Update: Foreign Investment in Thailand Plunges 78%, Vietnam Sets Record," *Bangkok Post*, January 13, 2016, [www.bangkokpost.com/learning/work/823592/update-foreign-investment-in-thailand-plunges-78-vietnam-sets-record](http://www.bangkokpost.com/learning/work/823592/update-foreign-investment-in-thailand-plunges-78-vietnam-sets-record).

<sup>212</sup> "Investment Climate Statement," Embassy of the United States Bangkok Thailand, 15 May 2015, [www.bangkok.usembassy.gov/ics\\_thailand.html](http://www.bangkok.usembassy.gov/ics_thailand.html).

<sup>213</sup> Kyojuka, "Thai Economy."



enforcement cooperation. In 2008, military aid was restored to pre-coup levels for IMET and FMF. Then, both countries signed a joint vision statement for a Thai-U.S. Defense Alliance in 2012, committing security cooperation to achieve peace and prosperity in the region.<sup>214</sup> Following the 2014 coup, the U.S. government was forced to suspend military aid to Thailand. This section emphasizes the importance of security cooperation, shows how the U.S. government maintained both Cobra Gold and ILEA and suspended military aid for IMET and FMF, and concludes that the administration disapproved of Thailand's coup but responded in a similar manner as it had to the previous coup.

## **1. Cobra Gold**

Cobra Gold, the largest multinational exercise in the Pacific, has evolved to become a distinguished exercise that fosters cooperation and stability in Southeast Asia and throughout the world. This type of collaboration further strengthens current relationships and creates new opportunities for friendship. The commanding general of USARPAC, Lieutenant General Benjamin Mixon, stated his objectives for Cobra Gold 2009 were “to teach coalition warfare and provide tactical training.”<sup>215</sup> He further emphasized the strategic goal was to build relationships. From 2009 to 2014, Cobra Gold incorporated new participating states, such as Malaysia in 2011, and observing countries, such as Burma, China, and Vietnam, making it the world's largest combined military exercise.<sup>216</sup> Thailand invited Burmese Armed Forces officers in 2013 and again in 2014 to expose the Burmese military to internationally respected military counterparts and demonstrate how these militaries inculcate international standards—especially the respect

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<sup>214</sup> Chanlett-Avery and Dolven, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), 6, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; “2012 Joint Vision Statement for the Thai-U.S. Defense Alliance,” news release, November 15, 2012, [www.archive.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=15685](http://www.archive.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=15685).

<sup>215</sup> Kevin Baron, “Cobra Gold 2009: Building Trust High on the Agenda,” *Stars and Stripes*, February 11, 2009, [www.stripes.com/news/cobra-gold-2009-building-trust-high-on-the-agenda-1.88012](http://www.stripes.com/news/cobra-gold-2009-building-trust-high-on-the-agenda-1.88012).

<sup>216</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2010), 8, 11, 13–14; <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Kristie Kenney, “Ambassador's Remarks: Cobra Gold 2011 Closing Ceremony,” news release, February 18, 2011, [www.bangkok.usembassy.gov/news/press/2011/nrot012.html](http://www.bangkok.usembassy.gov/news/press/2011/nrot012.html); Gregory B. Poling, “The Case for Holding Cobra Gold 2015 in Thailand,” 30 October 2014, <http://csis.org/print/52484>.

for human rights—into their planning and operational execution.<sup>217</sup> The bilateral exercise transformed into a setting for multilateral cooperation to cultivate relationships that are strategically valuable for both co-hosts.

Cobra Gold provides a venue to improve coordination not only between U.S. and Thailand armed forces but also with participating and observing countries. By 2014, participating states included Thailand, the United States, Singapore, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and South Korea, with a total of more than 13,000 service members.<sup>218</sup> China became an Observer Plus, meaning its service members observed and participated in the noncombat portions of the exercise.<sup>219</sup> Furthermore, official observers included those from 11 nations: China, Burma, Vietnam, Laos, South Africa, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Ukraine, Russia, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom.<sup>220</sup> Gregory Poling of the Center for Strategic and International Studies emphasizes that “all of this exposure is indispensable to building strategic trust and interoperability in the wider region, especially in critical areas like HADR, military medicine, and search and rescue.”<sup>221</sup> During her first Cobra Gold in 2011, U.S. ambassador to Thailand Kristie Kenney asserted that Cobra Gold would allow militaries “to forge lasting friendships that will pay dividends for years to come... [these relationships] will be a key factor in the future success of joint humanitarian and regional security operations in the future.”<sup>222</sup> Kenney also specifically highlighted that Thailand is our ally, the Thai people are our friends, and she hopes that friendship will last a lifetime. Cobra Gold is not only a premier multilateral military exercise, it has also become a tool for U.S. regional diplomacy.

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<sup>217</sup> Committee on Foreign Relations, National Security and Foreign Policy Priorities in the FY 2015 International Affairs Budget, Second Session, April 8, 2014.

<sup>218</sup> Erik Slavin, “U.S., Thai Officials Planning Cobra Gold Exercise Despite May Coup,” *Stars and Stripes*, October 10, 2014, [www.stripes.com/news/pacific/thailand/us-thai-officials-planning-cobra-gold-exercise-despite-may-coup-1.307643](http://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/thailand/us-thai-officials-planning-cobra-gold-exercise-despite-may-coup-1.307643); “China and Vietnam Official Observers at Cobra Gold 2014 in Thailand,” *Chiang Rai Times*, February 6, 2014, [www.chiangraitimes.com/china-and-vietnam-official-observers-at-cobra-gold-2014-in-thailand.html](http://www.chiangraitimes.com/china-and-vietnam-official-observers-at-cobra-gold-2014-in-thailand.html).

<sup>219</sup> Chanlett-Avery and Dolven, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), 8, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

<sup>220</sup> Slavin, “China and Vietnam Official Observers at Cobra Gold 2014 in Thailand.”

<sup>221</sup> Poling, “The Case for Holding Cobra Gold 2015 in Thailand.”

<sup>222</sup> Kenney, “Ambassador’s Remarks: Cobra Gold 2011 Closing Ceremony.”

Following the May 2014 coup, the U.S. government once again immediately suspended military assistance funds for Thailand but subsequently took a more diplomatic approach to bilateral security engagements. Initially, Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) 2014, an annual bilateral U.S. Navy exercise that was in progress, was canceled. Hanuman Guardian, an annual bilateral Army exercise scheduled for June, was also canceled, and invitations were revoked for Thai observers to attend the biannual multilateral maritime Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise.<sup>223</sup> However, after this particular coup, the U.S. government established a case-by-case interagency vetting process to determine approval for all security engagements. For example, sales of select weapons and equipment that could be used to oppress the Thai people have been suspended. Planning conferences for Cobra Gold 2015 were postponed, then canceled, and later approved after the administration decided to continue with the exercise. Additionally, the exercise's scope and mission were significantly refocused on HADR and scaled down in terms of U.S. troop participation.

The United States publically exhibited its displeasure with Thailand's coup but sent a stronger message by continuing Cobra Gold. U.S. officials reduced U.S. military participation by sending 3,600 U.S. troops in 2015 and 2016 instead of the previous 4,300 in 2014; however, the number of participant and observer nations increased from 18 in 2014 to 24 and 27 in 2015 and 2016, respectively.<sup>224</sup> In 2015, chargé d'affaires W. Patrick Murphy conveyed the unwavering U.S. commitment to Asia and specifically Thailand, a close friend and ally for 182 years.<sup>225</sup> He added that the multinational military exercise transcends any bilateral relationship because it strengthens cooperation in the region. In 2016, Ambassador Glyn Davies reaffirmed that Cobra Gold "demonstrate[s] America's unshakable, long-standing commitment to this [Southeast Asian] region. That commitment is strong and enduring, including here in Thailand,

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<sup>223</sup> Personal communication with JUSMAGTHAI, November 22, 2015, Monterey, CA.

<sup>224</sup> W. Patrick Murphy, "Cobra Gold 2015 Opening Remarks," news release, February 9, 2015, [http://bangkok.usembassy.gov/020915\\_cda\\_cg15remarks.html](http://bangkok.usembassy.gov/020915_cda_cg15remarks.html); Ehrlich, "Obama Scales Down Annual Cobra Gold Military Exercises"; Wassana Nanuam, "Cobra Gold Begins with U.S. Call for Elected Thai Govt," *Bangkok Post*, February 9, 2016, [www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/857496/cobra-gold-begins-with-us-call-for-elected-thai-govt](http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/857496/cobra-gold-begins-with-us-call-for-elected-thai-govt).

<sup>225</sup> Murphy, "Cobra Gold 2015 Opening Remarks."

where it transcends any temporary challenges that arise in our partnership.”<sup>226</sup> Davies inferred that the relationship could reach its full potential once Thailand returns to a sustainable democratic system and advocated that the relationship already has a solid foundation to build upon. A reduced U.S. presence was the administration’s way of showing disapproval to the coup, but a stronger response would have been completely canceling or moving the venue to a different country. Continuing Cobra Gold uninterrupted suggests that the United States values the preservation of defense cooperation with its ally Thailand, as well as with the region, more than it disapproves of the coup.

## **2. International Military Education and Training Program**

After the United States certified that Thailand had returned to democracy in 2008, the U.S. Congress resumed funding for the IMET program. IMET funding is appropriated each year for the following fiscal year (FY). A given FY begins on 1 October and ends on 30 September, and the year is designated by the calendar year in which it ends. For example, FY2008 begins on 1 October 2007 and ends on 30 September 2008.

The United States appeared to cultivate security cooperation through IMET funding. Between FY2008 and FY2014, the U.S. Congress allocated Thailand an average of approximately \$1.4 million per year for IMET. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of State requested an increase of \$2.1 million in 2015. In fact, Thailand was one of the top priority recipients of IMET funding according to the FY2015 Congressional Budget Justification presented by the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs in March 2014.<sup>227</sup> A \$12.5 million budget was requested specifically for East Asia and the Pacific, and the key recipients were Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Figure 9 illustrates IMET funding for Thailand from FY2008 through FY2015. This data were drawn from the U.S. Department of State IMET account summary online

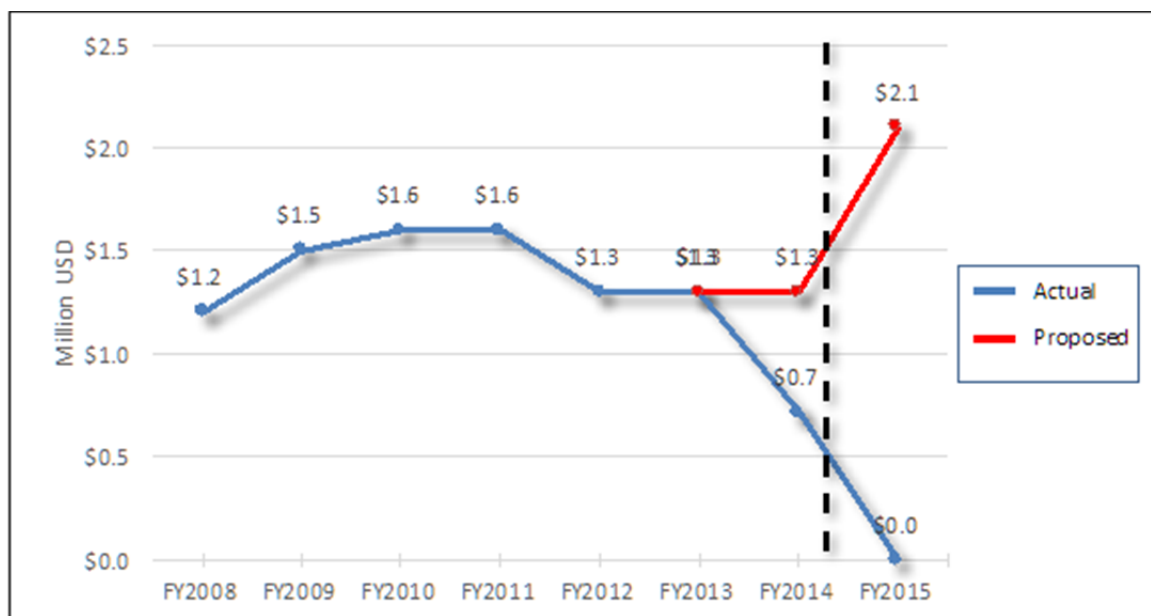
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<sup>226</sup> Nanuam, “Cobra Gold Begins with U.S. Call for Elected Thai Govt.”

<sup>227</sup> “Congressional Budget Justification: Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Fiscal Year 2015,” ed. the Secretary of State (4 March 2014), 117. [www.state.gov/s/d/rm/c61875.htm](http://www.state.gov/s/d/rm/c61875.htm).

database. The amounts shown from FY2008 through FY2013 are actual expenditures. The FY2014 amount of \$1.3 million was approved, but the actual amount expended was \$713 thousand before funds were suspended following the 2014 coup. The red line in Figure 9 represents the requested amount. Further, the amount shown for FY2015 was the requested budget for Thailand submitted to Congress prior to the coup. It appears that bilateral security cooperation with IMET was trending up.

Figure 9. International Military Education and Training Funding for Thailand FY2008 through FY2015<sup>228</sup>



The dashed vertical line represents Thailand's 2014 coup.

However, this IMET funding for Thailand was immediately suspended following the 2014 coup and has not yet been reinstated. In FY2014, Thailand's budget was earmarked for approximately \$1.3 million, but the actual expenditure was approximately \$713 thousand. Thai officers who were already executing IMET training were allowed to continue, but Thailand now had to pay to send future students to train in the IMET program. For example, the Naval Postgraduate School had two Thai students who graduated in 2015: one grandfathered under IMET funding and the other sponsored by

<sup>228</sup> Adapted from the U.S. Department of State International Military Education and Training Account Summary, 16 February 2016, [www.state.gov/t/pm/ppa/sat/c14562.htm](http://www.state.gov/t/pm/ppa/sat/c14562.htm).

Thai government funds.<sup>229</sup> The funding originally requested in FY2015 for Thailand was recuperated by the State Department's Budget Amendment Justification and then applied to other programs focused on emerging threats, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).<sup>230</sup> Furthermore, the State Department did not request IMET funding for Thailand for either FY2016 or FY2017. In regard to IMET, the U.S. response to Thailand's 2014 coup appears to follow the same pattern as that of the 2006 coup.

### **3. Foreign Military Sales**

Thailand's access to FMS continued uninterrupted despite both coups, but FMF was negatively affected by the coup. Following the 2006 coup, FMF resumed in 2008, and between FY2008 and FY2014, Thailand was allocated an average of approximately \$1.3 million per year to upgrade its military equipment. In the FY2015 Congressional Budget Justification, the Department of State declared the \$67.4 million earmarked for East Asia and the Pacific was necessary to "further U.S. interest around the world by helping ensure that coalition partners and friendly foreign governments are capable of working toward common security goals and sharing burdens in joint missions."<sup>231</sup> The department further linked this financial assistance to supporting the administration's rebalance toward Asia and demonstrating its commitment to the region. Thailand remained a critical player in the rebalancing effort, and the resumption of FMF allowed it to purchase weapons using U.S. guaranteed loans.

Figure 10 illustrates FMF funding for Thailand from FY2008 through FY2015. This data were drawn from the U.S. Department of State's FMF account summary online database. The amounts shown from FY2008 through FY2013 are actual expenditures while the FY2014 amount of \$1.0 million was an estimate. Notably, the FY2015 amount of \$0.9 million was requested prior to the 2014 coup. According to CRS reports, Thailand

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<sup>229</sup> Personal conversation with two Royal Thai Officers, November 18, 2015, Monterey, CA; "Naval Postgraduate School Commencement Ceremony / Class of December 2015," (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 2015).

<sup>230</sup> "Budget Amendment Justification: Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Fiscal Year 2015," ed. U.S. Secretary of State (2014), [www.state.gov/s/d/rm/c61875.htm](http://www.state.gov/s/d/rm/c61875.htm).

<sup>231</sup> "Congressional Budget Justification: Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Fiscal Year 2015," ed. U.S. Secretary of State, 119, [www.state.gov/s/d/rm/c61875.htm](http://www.state.gov/s/d/rm/c61875.htm).

received approximately \$1.4 million per year from FY2002 to FY2006, which ended in September, the same month as the 2006 coup.<sup>232</sup> Figure 10 shows that from the first full fiscal year of restored military assistance in FY2009 to the estimated FY2014 budget, the U.S. Congress allocated approximately \$1.4 million per fiscal year. FMF appears to have resumed to previous averages for Thailand.<sup>233</sup> Both FY2014 and FY2015 figures were submitted to Congress prior to Thailand's coup in May 2014, so the decreased funding request was not directly influenced by the coup. Accordingly, the 2015 CRS report notes that the actual FY2014 expenditure amount and FY2015 funds, as indicated by the red line, have been retracted and reallocated.<sup>234</sup> The blue line in Figure 10 represents the actual figure following the military aid suspensions. Thailand's access to U.S.-backed finance-friendly rates were halted, and the Thai government would have to seek other purchasing alternatives.

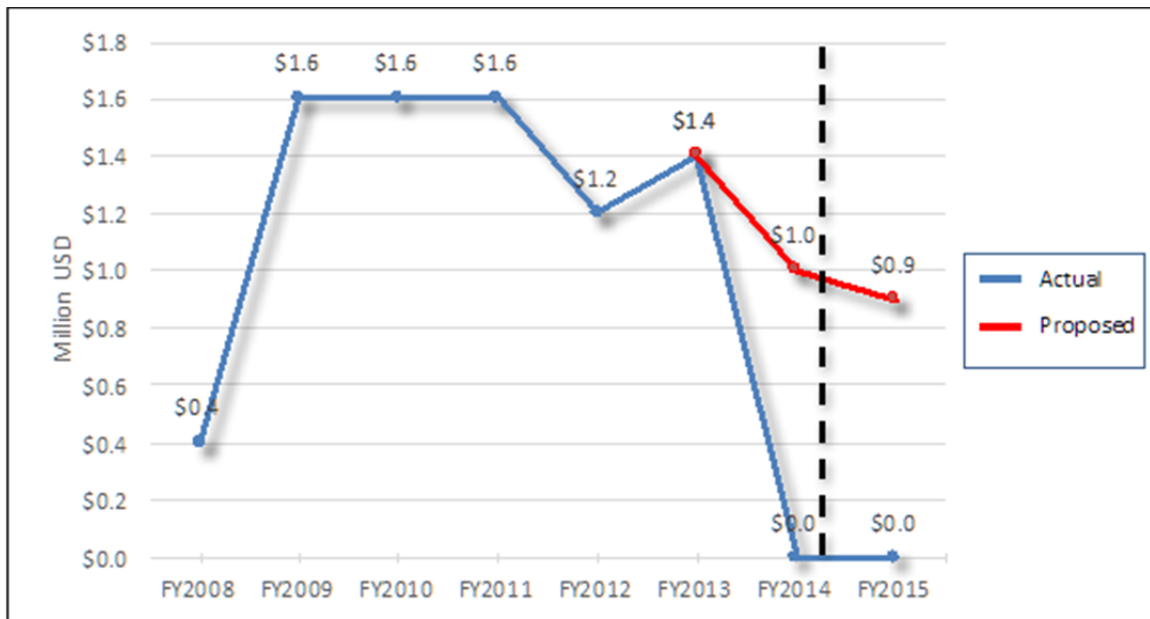
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<sup>232</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2006), 18–19, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.; “Foreign Military Financing Account Summary,” U.S. Department of State, 16 February 2016, [www.state.gov/t/pm/ppa/sat/c14560.htm](http://www.state.gov/t/pm/ppa/sat/c14560.htm).

<sup>234</sup> Chanlett-Avery and Dolven, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), 17, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

Figure 10. Foreign Military Financing for Thailand from FY2008 to FY2015<sup>235</sup>



The dashed vertical line represents Thailand's 2014 coup.

While FMF was suspended following the coup, FMS and EDA remained available for Thailand to purchase with its own funds; however, the U.S. Embassy established an interagency vetting process to scrutinize such sales. This process allows for methodical oversight surrounding the interpretation of U.S. policy. For example, although Thailand continued to have access to EDA, the Royal Thai Army's request for excess high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles (HMMWVs) was canceled following the coup. Later, through its newly established interagency process, the U.S. Embassy decided to suspend sales of small arms and particular types of equipment that could be used to oppress the general public. Although it seems consistent with the letter of the law, this determination appears ambiguous since any weapon or piece of equipment could be used for malicious purposes. Nevertheless, the process gave U.S. officials flexibility to allow or limit the sale of equipment to the Thai government. In

<sup>235</sup> Adapted from the U.S. Department of State Foreign Military Financing Account Summary, 16 February 2016, [www.state.gov/t/pm/ppa/sat/c14560.htm](http://www.state.gov/t/pm/ppa/sat/c14560.htm).



response, Thailand has been diversifying by keeping its security purchasing options open to other major powers such as China and Russia.<sup>236</sup>

#### **4. International Law Enforcement Academy Bangkok (Law Enforcement Cooperation)**

Bilateral law enforcement cooperation continued unaffected by both the 2006 and 2014 coups. Between FY2007 and FY2014, Thailand received an average of \$1.6 million per fiscal year, and currently it continues to receive allocated international narcotics and law enforcement funds.<sup>237</sup> The U.S. and Thai governments both remain committed to enhancing regional cooperation against transnational crimes by strengthening ties with participating countries in Southeast Asia. For example, in 2008, bilateral law enforcement efforts resulted in the arrest of an international arms dealer, Victor Bout.<sup>238</sup> Moreover, the U.S. Embassy's FY2013 Mission Strategic and Resource Plan detailed the importance of improving Thailand's law enforcement into an effective and trustworthy criminal justice system that is consistent with international standards and respectful of human rights.<sup>239</sup> Transnational crime in the region remains a significant threat to national and global security, and ILEA Bangkok serves as a uniform conduit for international security cooperation against that threat.

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<sup>236</sup> Ehrlich, "Thailand Nears \$1 Billion Submarine Deal"; Belford, "Junta-Ruled Thailand Flirts with Russia"; Nopporn Wong-Anan and Wassana Nanuam, "Regime Seeks Russia's Backing," *Bangkok Post*, February 27, 2016, [www.bangkokpost.com/news/politics/878500/regime-seeks-russia-backing](http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/politics/878500/regime-seeks-russia-backing); Prashanth Parameswaran, "Thailand Not Tilting Towards China, Away from U.S.: Expert," *Diplomat* (13 August 2015), [www.thediplomat.com/2015/08/thailand-not-tilting-towards-china-away-from-us-expert/?allpages=yes&print=yes](http://www.thediplomat.com/2015/08/thailand-not-tilting-towards-china-away-from-us-expert/?allpages=yes&print=yes); Wassana Nanuam, "Russia Offers to Build Armaments Plant in Thailand," *Bangkok Post*, February 26, 2016, [www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/878136/russia-offers-to-build-armaments-plant-in-thailand](http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/878136/russia-offers-to-build-armaments-plant-in-thailand).

<sup>237</sup> Chanlett-Avery and Dolven, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), 8, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Chanlett-Avery, Dolven, and Mackey *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2015), 17, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

<sup>238</sup> Chanlett-Avery and Dolven, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), 9, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

<sup>239</sup> "FY2013 Program and Budget Guide: East Asia and the Pacific," U.S. Department of State, 29 February 2016, [www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/rpt/pbg/fy2013/206685.htm#Thailand](http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/rpt/pbg/fy2013/206685.htm#Thailand).

The global problem of transnational crime offset the Obama administration's disapproval of the 2014 coup. Southeast Asia's economy has grown rapidly in the world market, but unfortunately, so has cross-border crime. Such crimes are no longer compartmentalized in one country and require effective international security cooperation. For example, analysts argue that the terrorist bombing at Bangkok's Erawan shrine in 2015 was targeted against Chinese in Thailand as an act of revenge for Thailand's deportation of Uyghur Muslim Chinese back to China.<sup>240</sup> Grievances from the ethnic minority group in China turned into violence within Thailand's borders. According to a report from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Organized groups proliferate and perpetrate crimes faster than trade planners and public security agencies develop the skills and relationships to fight them."<sup>241</sup> The report further recommends the need for international cooperation, including training on transnational challenges and on existing means to counter transnational crime. Transnational crime remains a national security threat for the United States and Thailand and for neighbors in Southeast Asia, and ILEA Bangkok provides training and networking that promotes regional consensus.

In sum, the United States and Thailand maintain a close and cooperative law enforcement relationship. The U.S. government continues to fund ILEA Bangkok and encourages Thai law enforcement counterparts to closely observe the rule of law. Additionally, both countries share extradition and mutual legal assistance treaty agreements. According to the U.S. Department of State Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, Thailand is considered one of the "most effective and cooperative partners of the United States in Southeast Asia, with U.S. assistance facilitating and enhancing that cooperation."<sup>242</sup> With U.S. assistance for

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<sup>240</sup> Amy Sawitta Lefevre and Andrew R.C. Marshall, "Bangkok Shrine Bombers First Targeted Pier for Chinese Tourists," Reuters, February 25, 2016, [www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-blast-china-idUSKCN0VY2XP](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-blast-china-idUSKCN0VY2XP).

<sup>241</sup> "Protecting Peace and Prosperity in Southeast Asia: Synchronizing Economic and Security Agendas," *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime* (February 2016): 45, [www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific/Publications/2016/Protecting\\_peace\\_and\\_prosperity\\_in\\_SEA.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific/Publications/2016/Protecting_peace_and_prosperity_in_SEA.pdf).

<sup>242</sup> "International Narcotics Control Strategy Report," *United States Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs* 1 (March 2015): 292, [www.state.gov/documents/organization/239560.pdf](http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/239560.pdf).

equipment and training, Thailand has increased its border law enforcement cooperation against trafficking. ILEA Bangkok provides a means to strengthen bilateral and multilateral partnerships against narcotics, trafficking, terrorism, and other transnational crimes. The U.S. government continues to fund this program, signaling that the transnational threat requires a strong bilateral law enforcement relationship that is more important than the U.S. government's disapproval of Thailand's 2014 coup.

### **C. DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS**

The diplomatic relationship between the United States and Thailand resumed following the disruption of the 2006 coup. From 2008 to 2014, the United States made a pivot to the Asia-Pacific region, and both states seemed determined to show their commitment to the bilateral relationship. More specifically, the United States took deliberate action, generating a rebalance strategy that emphasized key allies in the region. President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama visited Bangkok in 2008 and 2012, respectively. Further, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton made three official visits, and Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and Thai Minister of Defense Sukumpol Suwannathat signed a joint vision statement for a U.S.-Thai defense alliance.<sup>243</sup> Several members of Congress and other government officials met with their Thai counterparts to discuss the importance of the alliance and cooperation opportunities.<sup>244</sup> In 2013, U.S. secretary of state John Kerry and Thai deputy prime minister/foreign minister Surapong Tovichakchaikul negotiated increased U.S.-Thai cooperation in Asia's multilateral institutions. While Thailand was struggling to maintain political stability, the United States was relying on Thailand and four other allies in the Asia-Pacific region as the foundation of security and prosperity.<sup>245</sup> By 2014, U.S.-Thailand diplomatic relations appeared to have recovered from the 2006 coup and were continuing to improve.

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<sup>243</sup> "Presidents Travels to Thailand," U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, 3 April 2016, <https://history.state.gov/departmenhistory/travels/president/thailand>; "Secretary Travels to Thailand," U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, 3 April 2016, <https://history.state.gov/departmenhistory/travels/secretary/thailand>; U.S. Department of State, "Timeline of U.S.-Thai Relations."

<sup>244</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Timeline of U.S.-Thai Relations."

<sup>245</sup> Obama, "National Security Strategy, 2015" 42.

Stability in Thailand is strategically important to the United States. During Thailand's political turmoil, which turned to violence in the streets and disrupted the Thai economy, U.S. officials urged Thailand to find a peaceful and democratic resolution.<sup>246</sup> Secretary Clinton urged for peaceful dialogue and stressed the following to Thai officials: "While you continue on the path to resolve your political differences, we remain confident in the strong, enduring bonds between the United States and Thailand."<sup>247</sup> After the military coup, Secretary Kerry immediately expressed disappointment and urged for a quick return to democracy.<sup>248</sup> Then in 2015, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs Daniel Russel clarified that "We're not attempting to dictate the political path that Thailand should follow to get back to democracy or take sides in Thai politics. But an inclusive process promotes political reconciliation, which in turn is key to long-term stability. That's where our interests lie."<sup>249</sup> The United States benefits more from a domestically stable ally that can focus and partner toward regional affairs. Principal deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs Scot Marciel later visited with senior Thai officials to express commitment to ongoing U.S.-Thai cooperation but also political reform and democratic development in Thailand.<sup>250</sup>

However, the absence of a U.S. ambassador in late 2014 sent a negative message to Thailand, but vacant ambassador positions at U.S. embassies were common at this time and appointments were heavily scrutinized throughout the Obama administration.<sup>251</sup> Career ambassadors typically serve three years at a foreign post, and Ambassador Kristie

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<sup>246</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Timeline of U.S.-Thai Relations"; Peter Shadbolt, "Thailand's 'up Country' Boom Fuels Political Divide," CNN, 18 February 2014, [www.cnn.com/2013/12/10/world/asia/thailand-protests-society/](http://www.cnn.com/2013/12/10/world/asia/thailand-protests-society/).

<sup>247</sup> Pavin Chachavalponpun, "American Position vis-a-vis Thai Coup: Illusion Part One," Prachatai English, May 31, 2014, [www.prachatai.com/english/print/4063](http://www.prachatai.com/english/print/4063).

<sup>248</sup> Kerry, "Coups in Thailand."

<sup>249</sup> Russel, "Remarks at the Institute of Security and International Studies."

<sup>250</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Timeline of U.S.-Thai Relations."

<sup>251</sup> Josh Rogin, "Several U.S. Embassies Could Start 2012 with No Ambassador," 7 December 2011, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/12/07/several-u-s-embassies-could-start-2012-with-no-ambassador/>; Juliet Eilperin, "Obama Ambassador Nominees Prompt an Uproar with Bungled Answers, Lack of Ties," *Washington Post*, February 14, 2014, [www.washingtonpost.com/politics/obama-ambassador-nominees-f-ties/2014/02/14/20fb0fe4-94b2-11e3-83b9-1f024193bb84\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/obama-ambassador-nominees-f-ties/2014/02/14/20fb0fe4-94b2-11e3-83b9-1f024193bb84_story.html); Beenish Ahmed, "Why Many of the World's 'Hot Spots' Have No U.S. Ambassador," Think Progress, November 18, 2014, <http://thinkprogress.org/world/2014/11/18/3593435/ambassador-nominations/>.

Kenney extended for a fourth year in 2014. When she transferred authority of the U.S. mission to the next senior U.S. official W. Patrick Murphy, chargé d'affaires ad interim, the U.S. Embassy was without an ambassador for almost a year. However, Thailand was not alone. In 2014, Secretary Kerry acknowledged that more than 25 percent of the 169 nations with a U.S. embassy were without an ambassador.<sup>252</sup> Glyn Davies was nominated in April 2015, confirmed by the Senate to be the U.S. ambassador to Thailand in June, and arrived in Thailand that September.<sup>253</sup> Ambassador Davies is a seasoned envoy with 35 years of diplomatic experience and a specialist in Asian affairs and international politics. When Ambassador Davies finally arrived in Thailand, Shawn Crispin, a Southeast Asia columnist at *The Diplomat*, commented that the new ambassador would be key to rekindling U.S.-Thailand relations.<sup>254</sup>

At present, Ambassador Davies is attempting to normalize diplomatic relations with Thailand. By confirming Davies, the U.S. government signaled that it still valued Thailand despite disapproval of the coup. Davies' first arrival in Thailand was followed by a well-received visit to the Grand Palace to pay respect and wish good health to the monarchy.<sup>255</sup> Furthermore, he received personal calls from privy councilors, royal advisors to the king, welcoming his appointment as ambassador. In his 2016 speech at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand, Ambassador Davies noted that while U.S. law restricts the full spectrum of security cooperation opportunities, both countries remain

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<sup>252</sup> William Douglas and Jonathan S. Landay, "Quarter of World Has No U.S. Ambassador," July 16, 2014, [www.mcclatchydc.com/news/politics-government/congress/article24770572.html](http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/politics-government/congress/article24770572.html); Lindsay Murdoch, "Thailand the Latest Country without U.S. Ambassador," 9 October 2014, [www.smh.com.au/world/thailand-the-latest-country-without-us-ambassador-20141008-113gf1.html](http://www.smh.com.au/world/thailand-the-latest-country-without-us-ambassador-20141008-113gf1.html).

<sup>253</sup> "U.S. Ambassadors to Thailand," Embassy of the United States Bangkok, Thailand, 4 March 2016, <http://bangkok.usembassy.gov/relation/175usth/timeline-of-u/american-ambassadors-to-thailand.html>; "U.S. Nominates New Ambassador to Thailand after Six-Month Vacancy," (14 April 2015), [www.nationmultimedia.com/politics/US-nominates-new-ambassador-to-Thailand-after-six--30258005.html](http://www.nationmultimedia.com/politics/US-nominates-new-ambassador-to-Thailand-after-six--30258005.html); Glyn Davies, "Nominee for Ambassador's Full Speech Testimony of Glyn Davies," in *Senate Foreign Relations Committee* (25 June 2015), [www.news.thaivisa.com/thailand/full-speech-of-glyn-davies-nominee-for-us-ambassador-to-thailand/101469/](http://www.news.thaivisa.com/thailand/full-speech-of-glyn-davies-nominee-for-us-ambassador-to-thailand/101469/); Shawn W. Crispin, "New Ambassador Holds Key to U.S.-Thailand Relations," *Diplomat* (26 September 2015), [www.thediplomat.com/2015/09/new-ambassador-holds-key-to-us-thailand-relations/](http://www.thediplomat.com/2015/09/new-ambassador-holds-key-to-us-thailand-relations/).

<sup>254</sup> Crispin, "New Ambassador Holds Key to U.S.-Thailand Relations."

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

fully engaged in areas such as HADR.<sup>256</sup> For example, Cobra Gold 2015 and 2016 both shifted mission to focus on HADR cooperation. Further, he acknowledged the struggle Thailand faces in its return to democracy and expressed commitment to the relationship. Davies' impressive experience as a career diplomat, his background in the region, and his engagement with key Thai leaders indicates that the administration seeks a sincere and able representative to improve the relationship.

The U.S. response to Thailand's 2014 coup appears similar to its response to the 2006 coup; however, the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok established an interagency vetting process to determine specific application of military sanctions. When the 2014 coup happened in Thailand, U.S. law mandated that the U.S. government suspend bilateral military assistance, currently totaling \$4.7 million.<sup>257</sup> Once again, the U.S. Embassy issued a standard security message alerting U.S. citizens of the development in Thailand, but it did not restrict travel or evacuate citizens.<sup>258</sup> This time, the U.S. Embassy's interagency vetting process evaluates and scrutinizes unclear issues surrounding security cooperation with Thailand in accordance with the Foreign Operations Appropriations Act restrictions.<sup>259</sup> For example, this interagency makes decisions on specific weapons sales, high-level exchanges, and military exercises. This new development appears to allow the administration greater flexibility to reward or punish Thailand. Overall, changes to diplomatic relations appear minimal and suggest the U.S. government has chosen the path of mostly nonintervention against the 2014 coup. The executive decision by President Obama continuing Cobra Gold but limiting U.S. military participation is perhaps a revealing reflection of the path the government has chosen. On one hand the U.S.

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<sup>256</sup> Nuchanard Krengsillathum, "Welcoming Evening with the New U.S. Ambassador to Thailand," *Elite Plus*, January 4, 2016, [www.eliteplusmagazine.com/home/content/90/8](http://www.eliteplusmagazine.com/home/content/90/8).

<sup>257</sup> Chanlett-Avery, Dolven, and Mackey, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2015), 2, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; "Security Message for U.S. Citizens: Security Situation in Thailand," Embassy of the United States Bangkok, Thailand, 23 May 2014, <http://bangkok.usembassy.gov/052314securitymessage.html>.

<sup>258</sup> Jen Psaki, "Daily Press Briefing," news release, May 22, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2014/05/226459.htm>.

<sup>259</sup> Personal communication with JUSMAGTHAI, November 22, 2015, Monterey, CA.

government sent the message of commitment to Thailand, and on the other hand it reiterated disapproval of the coup.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Thailand's 2014 coup appeared to interrupt U.S.-Thailand relations, but the U.S. response was similar to the previous coup in tone and action. Economically, Thailand's growth continues to climb despite stalled FTA negotiations. Bilateral trade grew at a steady pace, but U.S. FDI in Thailand significantly declined following the coup. However, Thailand's BOI made deliberate policy changes, which became effective in 2015, and offers a better explanation to this anticipated decline in overall foreign investment. Security cooperation remained strong and, with the exception of a new interagency vetting process, appeared almost indistinguishable from the previous coup response. Once again, in accordance to the Foreign Assistance Act Section 508, the U.S. government suspended military financing and training programs to Thailand but maintained funding for law enforcement, counterterrorism, and other assistance programs. Both ILEA Bangkok and Cobra Gold continued uninterrupted, with the latter altering in mission and U.S. participation. IMET and FMF funds were withdrawn, but access to U.S. schools, FMS, and EDA remained available to Thailand. Diplomatically, the initial U.S. rhetoric appeared stern but considering the spectrum of diplomatic tools used seems relatively subdued. According to Ernest Bower of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, "The U.S. is probably compelled by the law to suspend some aid, and yes we need to abide by the law, but what's really important is a strong private diplomacy."<sup>260</sup> U.S. leaders have occasionally reminded the Thai government to return to democracy but have not taken stronger action considering the diplomatic tools available. Overall, the current U.S. response to the 2014 coup appears to be calculated, reserved, and retracted noninterference to Thailand's domestic political reform.

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<sup>260</sup> Jessica Schulberg, "The Military Coup in Thailand Is Putting the U.S. in an Awkward Position," 23 May 2014, <https://newrepublic.com/article/117894/thailand-coup-foreign-assistance-act-put-us-awkward-position>.

## IV. ANALYSIS

To better understand the U.S. responses to Thailand's 2006 and 2014 coups, this chapter examines the events presented in the last two chapters through the lens of the balance of power, alliance, and democratization theories. These coups affected the U.S.-Thai relationship to varying degrees in the areas of the economy, security, and diplomacy. Still, the United States remained committed to and engaged with its long-term ally. U.S. officials responded to each coup pragmatically while taking into consideration Thai leaders' actions, the regional balance of power, and the significant value of the long-term partnership, especially in terms of security interests. Although Thailand's domestic political struggles resulted in a deep divide within the Kingdom, the U.S. government avoided favoring either side and urged Thai leaders to find a peaceful solution. As a result, the administration took the middle road by displaying its displeasure of Thailand's democratic setback, which is consistent with U.S. foreign policy objectives to encourage more states to become liberal democracies, and by demonstrating its strong commitment to Thailand, which is consistent with countering China's growing influence in the region.

### A. BALANCE OF POWER

Balance of power theory explains why states interact in certain ways to maintain self-preservation in an "anarchic" international system. States are unitary actors that aim to survive. Kenneth Waltz maintains that the structure of the international system forces great powers to pay careful attention to the balance of power.<sup>261</sup> He further argues that states behave defensively to maintain rather than upset the balance of power.<sup>262</sup> Because power is the most basic and effective means of surviving and preventing wars, states will often compete for real or perceived power, which is usually a combination of economic, security, or diplomatic elements. States can improve internally by increasing economic and military strength and externally by creating alliances and pooling resources. In

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<sup>261</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 98–129, 71–75; John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014), 19–22.

<sup>262</sup> Waltz, *Neorealism*, 98–100.



general, states will improve capacity internally or cooperate with other states to check the power of a dominant state or bloc of states. John Mearsheimer concludes that great powers strive to achieve four main goals that impact other states: “(1) to be the only regional hegemon on the globe, (2) to control as large a percentage of the world’s wealth as possible, (3) to dominate the balance of land power in their region, and (4) to have nuclear superiority.”<sup>263</sup> This theory offers a compelling explanation of foreign policies that are aimed at self-preservation, such as with Thailand, and power projection and maintenance, such as the U.S. objectives to rebalance to Asia as China’s power grows.

### **1. Economic**

Balance of power theory suggests that states will respond when economic competitors disrupt the status quo. Great powers do not want their rivals to dominate the wealth-generating areas or sea lanes of the world, like Southeast Asia. The U.S. economic competitors in the region are China and Japan, and all three countries have been Thailand’s top bilateral trade partners for the past decade. Although the United States has been the dominant economic partner with Thailand, both Japan in 2001 and China in 2006 increased bilateral trade to levels that surpassed that of the United States. The balance of power theory suggests that the United States would be concerned if its competitors increased this margin substantially, which could encourage it to increase bilateral trade and other economic ties. A formalized U.S.-Thailand FTA, for instance, would have improved trade opportunities and potentially the U.S. share of trade with Thailand.

However, Japan is currently not that far ahead of the United States, and as of 2012, China is showing signs of leveling off at a similar rate to that of the United States. Additionally, U.S. bilateral trade with Thailand has remained at a steady pace, and the United States has continued to be competitive among the top three trading partners, suggesting that the economic balance of power has not been significantly disrupted. Therefore, the United States does not appear to need a formalized FTA with Thailand now to preserve its economic position relative to its competitors.

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<sup>263</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 147.

Following the suspended U.S.-Thailand FTA, Thailand went on to secure trade agreements with China, Japan, and 18 other trade partners. Thailand's motivation in doing so seems to have more to do with maintaining or enhancing its own economic position in the global marketplace than in attempting to exclude the United States in the wake of pressure to democratize. Thailand's economic competitors can produce similar products at a lower labor cost. Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos also offer investors a more politically stable alternative than Thailand.

Thailand is attempting to avoid the middle-income trap by advancing its technology industry with greater emphasis on skilled labor. For instance, Thailand's BOI decided to promote skilled labor in the advanced technology industry.<sup>264</sup> In 2015, Thailand granted tax advantages to high-technology industries and eliminated existing incentives for other industries. During the first year of this transition, investors from the United States, China, and Japan responded by withdrawing FDI. Despite having a comparative advantage over other countries that invest in Thailand, U.S. investors outside the high-technology field suffered greater costs that did not appear to outweigh the benefits. As a result of Thailand's reforms, foreign investors, including the United States, decreased their stock in Thailand, and only time will tell if the FDI into Thailand will rebound, stabilize, and favor the United States.

## **2. Security**

U.S. military presence has dominated the region since the 1950s. Balance of power theory predicts that the United States will try to maintain its dominance, especially as China expands militarily. Exerting too much democratization pressure on Thailand after its most recent coups runs the risk of weakening U.S.-Thailand military engagement and providing opportunities to China and Russia, both of which are aggressively pursuing enhanced security relations with Thailand. Surachart Bamrungsuk, a military specialist, contends that while Thailand remains highly committed to its friendship with the United

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<sup>264</sup> Kyozyuka, "Thai Economy."

States, Thai leaders see no problem diversifying Thailand's options with other great powers.<sup>265</sup>

For instance, although the United States remains Thailand's preferred security partner, Thailand leaders are negotiating with both China and Russia for submarines, helicopters, and tanks. When the U.S. government suspended \$29 million in military aid to Thailand following the 2006 coup, China stepped in and provided a \$49 million security package.<sup>266</sup> Currently, China assists Thailand with military aid, weapons and equipment sales, military student exchanges, and bilateral exercises.<sup>267</sup> More recently, Thai leaders have engaged with Russia, another large power, to hedge Thailand's bets that the United States would respond in kind.<sup>268</sup> Morgenthau asserts that "the balancing process can be carried on either by diminishing the weight of the heavier scale or by increasing the weight of the lighter one."<sup>269</sup> After each coup, as Thailand diversified its security cooperation with other great powers, the options for the United States to protest by scaling back military-to-military relations diminished.

In response to this shift, the U.S. administration sought to maintain the balance of power by continuing security cooperation with Thailand, despite the coups in 2006 and 2014. The administration continued both Cobra Gold and ILEA. Canceling Cobra Gold, the multilateral exercise, would signal a wavering U.S. commitment to not only Thailand but also to the region. Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei, Indonesia, and the Philippines all have territorial disputes with China over the South China Sea and rely on the U.S. military to

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<sup>265</sup> Chachavalpongpan, "Competing Diplomacies," 313.

<sup>266</sup> Ehrlich, "China Muscling U.S. Aside in Thailand"; Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008), 14–15, <https://www.fas.org/sfp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

<sup>267</sup> Ehrlich, "China Muscling U.S. Aside in Thailand"; Ehrlich, "Thailand Nears \$1 Billion Submarine Deal"; Richard Ehrlich, "U.S. Sees China and Thailand Strengthen Military Relations," *Free Press*, 10 November 2015, [www.freepress.org/article/us-sees-china-thailand-strengthen-military-relations](http://www.freepress.org/article/us-sees-china-thailand-strengthen-military-relations); Richard Ehrlich "China-Thailand Joint Military Exercise Shows Longtime U.S. Ally Bangkok Hedging Its Bets," 9 November 2015, [www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/nov/9/china-thailand-joint-military-exercise-shows-longt/print/](http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/nov/9/china-thailand-joint-military-exercise-shows-longt/print/).

<sup>268</sup> Belford, "Junta-Ruled Thailand Flirts with Russia"; Wong-Anan and Nanuam, "Regime Seeks Russia's Backing"; Wassana Nanuam, "Russia Offers to Build Armaments Plant in Thailand," *Bangkok Post*, February 26, 2016, [www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/878136/russia-offers-to-build-armaments-plant-in-thailand](http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/878136/russia-offers-to-build-armaments-plant-in-thailand).

<sup>269</sup> Hans Joachim Morgenthau and Kenneth W. Thompson, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 242.

balance China's rise there now more than ever. ILEA Bangkok offers greater cost benefits for the United States, Thailand, and other regional partners that support national interests against transnational crimes. For instance, narcotics and human trafficking have been known to fund terrorist activities.<sup>270</sup> The ability to bring illegal items and people across borders also opens the door for terrorist infiltration. The money laundering that funds terrorism—smuggling of arms and nuclear and biological materials—threatens national and international security. The smuggling of arms and nuclear materials has a strong potential to destabilize the balance of power. Concern over these types of threats appear to have proven more significant for U.S. leaders than protesting Thailand's coup.

A potential security imbalance explains why the United States could not afford to exert greater pressure on Thailand following the 2006 and 2014 coups. While other great powers pursued Thailand, the U.S. government kept the door open to its long-term ally. It is not surprising that U.S. leaders allowed Thailand continued access to both IMET and FMS, albeit at the Kingdom's expense. Furthermore, although some members of Congress had suggested the United States should revoke Thailand's status as a major non-NATO ally, the administration sought to maintain its influence on Thailand.<sup>271</sup>

### **3. Diplomatic**

State actors carefully craft diplomacy with balance of power in mind, and the United States is no different. The United States has identified China and Russia as strategic competitors.<sup>272</sup> The theory suggests that the U.S. government would compromise if exerting greater pressure against the Thai junta meant the United States would lose influence to China or Russia. After the 2006 and 2014 coups, the U.S. government condemned the democratic setbacks, while China refused to interfere with Thailand's domestic affairs. Instead, China intensified its economic, security, and

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<sup>270</sup> Eben Kaplan, "Tracking Down Terrorist Financing," Council on Foreign Relations (4 April 2006), [www.cfr.org/terrorist-financing/tracking-down-terrorist-financing/p10356](http://www.cfr.org/terrorist-financing/tracking-down-terrorist-financing/p10356).

<sup>271</sup> House of Representatives, *Impact of Coup-Related Sanctions*, 8–9.

<sup>272</sup> Dominguez, "Why Thailand Is Boosting Ties with Russia and China"; Olson, "China Lurks as U.S. Ties with Thailand Splinter."

political ties with Thailand. Russia behaved similarly.<sup>273</sup> In terms of balance of power, this was hardly the time for the United States to alienate Thailand.

Thai actors have been relatively successful in showing the United States that they have alternatives and in playing China and Russia off the United States. Publicly, Thai leaders claim that they are not favoring relations with U.S. competitors, but that they are fostering a more balanced relationship with others, and these developments have not gone unnoticed by the United States.<sup>274</sup> Pushing Thailand away and toward China or Russia would be counterproductive to the U.S. rebalance-to-Asia efforts. Due to fear of stronger Sino-Thai relations and warming Russo-Thai relations, the U.S. response to Thailand's coups was limited to legally mandated suspension of military aid and limited press releases that gently condemned the military government. From this perspective, it came as no surprise that, in February 2016, President Obama invited Thailand's prime minister General Prayuth Chan-ocha to attend the U.S.-ASEAN Summit in California. Balance of power theory offers a compelling argument for how both states behaved following the 2006 and 2014 coups.

## **B. ALLIANCE**

States cooperate with one another to enhance their global positions. Noted international relations theorist Stephen Walt defines an alliance as a “formal or informal relationship of security cooperation between two or more sovereign states.”<sup>275</sup> An alliance agreement is essentially a joint declaration assuring support on particular issues and under certain conditions, such as an attack by a mutual enemy.<sup>276</sup> Throughout WWI and until the end of the Cold War, alliances and coalitions were generally formed to check a specific threat. Allies assisted one another both during peacetime in the form of deterrence and when at war. NATO, an intergovernmental alliance, is one durable

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<sup>273</sup> Nanuam, “Russia Offers to Build Armaments Plant in Thailand”; Wong-Anan and Nanuam, “Regime Seeks Russia's Backing”; Belford, “Junta-Ruled Thailand Flirts with Russia”; Sourat Rkhimbabaev, “The Road Ahead for Thai-Russian Trade Relations,” 29 July 2015, [www.rbth.com/business/2015/07/28/the\\_road\\_ahead\\_for\\_thai-russian\\_trade\\_relations\\_48045.html](http://www.rbth.com/business/2015/07/28/the_road_ahead_for_thai-russian_trade_relations_48045.html).

<sup>274</sup> Belford, “Junta-Ruled Thailand Flirts with Russia.”

<sup>275</sup> Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 1.

<sup>276</sup> James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, *Contending Theories of International Relations: A Comprehensive Survey*, 4th ed. (New York: Longman, 1997), 442.

example of a political and military alliance.<sup>277</sup> United States alliances with Japan, South Korea, and Thailand are others.

In general, alliances are formed as a result of perceived common interest, normally surrounding national security. Alliances provide resource-limited states a greater chance of survival. George Liska indicates that state actors “join alliances for security, stability, and status.”<sup>278</sup> Glenn Snyder asserts “formal alliances strengthen existing alignments . . . by their solemnity, specificity, legal and normative obligations and (in modern times) their public visibility.”<sup>279</sup> An alliance can be further strengthened in other ways, such as through diplomatic and military support. However, common interests may change and alliances can strengthen, weaken, or dissolve when states’ interests and behavior are no longer in accord.

### **1. Economic**

Alliance theory suggests that the United States and Thailand would come to support each other during times of economic distress and that they are likely to value FTA and other trade agreements with one another. Globalization has increased economic competition and the need for strategic alliances.<sup>280</sup> The U.S.-Thai Treaty of Amity is one such economic alliance, and FTA is fundamentally a formal economic trade arrangement similar to a security alliance. Thailand initially requested suspension of FTA negotiations earlier in 2006 so it could focus on its domestic turmoil. After the 2006 coup, the U.S. government announced the indefinite suspension of FTA until Thailand’s return to democracy.<sup>281</sup> However, neither country’s trade officials have reengaged negotiations since. This development appears to conflict with alliance theory and does not explain the static FTA. However, the United States could have applied more pressure on Thailand

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<sup>277</sup> “What Is NATO?,” NATO, 15 May 2016, [www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html](http://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html).

<sup>278</sup> Dougherty, *Contending Theories of International Relations*, 442.

<sup>279</sup> Glenn H. Snyder, “Alliance Theory: A Neorealist First Cut,” *Journal of International Affairs* 44, no. 1 (1990): 105.

<sup>280</sup> Paul R. Viotti and Mark V. Kauppi, *International Relations and World Politics: Security, Economy, Identity*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), 310–11.

<sup>281</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008), 13, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

after the 2006 and 2014 coups by purchasing similar goods from other countries or placing tariffs on Thailand's imports to the United States. Yet the bilateral trade continues to remain strong, cooperative, and mutually supportive, which is typical behavior of allies supporting one another. Although the alliance theory does not explain the death of the FTA, it does appear to apply to the slow but steady rise in bilateral trade.

Alliance theory also does not explain why U.S. FDI into Thailand decreased. According to this theory, U.S. FDI should have remained durable even under difficult conditions, but FDI by all Thailand's major investing partners decreased in 2015, not just that by the United States. A more compelling alternative explanation for the U.S. decrease in FDI into Thailand is that Thailand shifted policies to avoid the middle-income trap and remain competitive in the global market and affected investment by corporations from multiple countries.

The World Bank identified Thailand as one of the highest-performing Asian economies in the East Asian Miracle report, which came out in the 1990s.<sup>282</sup> At that time, Thailand was classified as a newly industrializing economy with a low-to-middle income economy. However, by 2011, Thailand was an upper-middle-income economy and had improved its relationship with the World Bank Group from borrower-lender to knowledge partner.<sup>283</sup> Currently, Thailand is transitioning to the next stage of economic development, favoring skilled labor in the high-technology industry that fosters innovation, a change which should be attractive to the United States in the future.

While some countries protect their domestic industries through high tariffs and other trade barriers, Thailand continues to favor U.S. investors by granting them near-equal rights to Thai investors.<sup>284</sup> U.S. investors still maintain a comparative advantage

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<sup>282</sup> John Page et al., "The East Asia Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy: Main Report," no. 12351 (26 September 1993): 1, [www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/1993/09/01/000009265\\_3970716142516/Rendered/PDF/multi\\_page.pdf](http://wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/1993/09/01/000009265_3970716142516/Rendered/PDF/multi_page.pdf); John Page, "The Making of the East Asia Miracle," World Bank Policy Research Bulletin 4, no. 4 (1993): 1–5, [http://graduateinstitute.ch/files/live/sites/iheid/files/shared/executive\\_education/summer\\_international-affairs\\_faculty-IA\\_professors/The%20making%20of%20the%20East%20Asia%20miracle.htm](http://graduateinstitute.ch/files/live/sites/iheid/files/shared/executive_education/summer_international-affairs_faculty-IA_professors/The%20making%20of%20the%20East%20Asia%20miracle.htm).

<sup>283</sup> "Thailand Now an Upper Middle Income Economy," The World Bank. (2 August 2011). <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2011/08/02/thailand-now-upper-middle-income-economy>

<sup>284</sup> U.S. Department of State, "2015 Investment Climate Statement—Thailand."

over other foreign investors, only now these benefits are primarily focused in the high-technology industry. While only time will tell if this strategic shift will pay off, Thailand appears to be on the path taken by other developed East Asian economies, such as South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. In the meantime, the behavior of Thailand shows steadfast commitment to its economic alliance with the United States.

## **2. Security**

Alliance theory explains why the United States continued security cooperation with Thailand, albeit in a restricted arrangement. Historically, the U.S.-Thailand alliance has remained durable, despite Thailand's double-digit coups. Allies depend on one another, but in times of need, state leaders may fear abandonment and entrapment. Several Southeast Asian states expressed concern about U.S. commitment to the region after the end of the Cold War. Fifteen years earlier, the United States abruptly withdrew from the Vietnam War arena. Yet, the mutual benefits to each party remains significant and have survived these massive shifts. Thailand continues to grant the U.S. military access to its ports and airfields, while the U.S. provides Thailand favored status as a key partner with the world's superpower.

Over time, threats change and alliances can shift, realign, or diminish. Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff argue that "once states join an alliance, there is an extensive and continuing bargaining process designed to maximize shared interest and to cope with security challenges posed by the enemy."<sup>285</sup> The U.S.-Thailand security alliance, originally intended to combat the threat of communism on mainland Southeast Asia, has now shifted focus toward combatting terrorism and transnational threats. These threats pose problems for both countries' national security interests, and leaders have set aside their differences to maintain cooperation, even after the 2006 and 2014 coups.

Alliance theory suggests that the United States would not abandon its security ally, especially one that has remained loyal since WWII. Thailand's coups have directly opposed the U.S. democratic principles, but since Cobra Gold commenced in 1982, the exercise has continued uninterrupted annually. Alex Zrvizu, deputy chief of mission for

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<sup>285</sup> Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, *Contending Theories of International Relations*, 444.



the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok, acknowledged that “for a quarter century, Cobra Gold has been the most visible symbol of U.S. and Thai military cooperation.”<sup>286</sup> Furthermore, since its establishment in 1998, ILEA Bangkok also remains funded and cohosted by U.S. and Thai officials. The only constriction of security engagement that runs counter to the alliance theory is the U.S.-mandated suspension of military aid for programs such as IMET and FMS. After the 2006 coup, Thailand returned quickly to a civilian elected government; therefore, the U.S. government was able to shed criticism for its continued cooperation with its Southeast Asian ally. Two years on, Thailand has yet to return to a civilian elected government after its most recent coup, yet the U.S. government has not abandoned its security ally. Alliance theory helps explain why the United States opted to maintain key activities between the two countries even as minor restrictions were applied.

### **3. Diplomatic**

The quid pro quo nature of alliance theory suggests that each state supports each other diplomatically whenever possible. This explains to some degree why the Bush and the Obama administrations exercised some discretion after Thailand’s 2006 and 2014 coups. A CRS report considers Thailand’s alliance to be highly valued and of strategic importance.<sup>287</sup> Following the 2006 coup, the U.S. response was considered relatively mute by many analysts.<sup>288</sup> After news of the coup broke, U.S. officials expressed hope that the people of Thailand would resolve their political differences by peaceful

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<sup>286</sup> Fayloga, “Pacific Partners Come Together”; Chachavalpongpun, “American Position vis-a-vis Thai Coup”; Adam R. Cole, “CTF 76 Begins Cobra Gold 2007 in Thailand,” (5 October 2007), [www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story\\_id=29302](http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=29302).

<sup>287</sup> Chanlett-Avery and Dolven, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), 6, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

<sup>288</sup> Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008), 7–8, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>; Chachavalpongpun, “American Position vis-a-vis Thai Coup.”

means.<sup>289</sup> Significantly, the United States did not offer sanctuary to ousted prime minister Thaksin, who was at the UN General Assembly in New York.

In 2014, the U.S. government response varied from its 2006 response in two minor details: the stern public statement by Secretary of State John Kerry and the administration's Cobra Gold military participation downgrade. However, since that initial statement, the U.S. government's public statements have been muted. Current downsizing of the U.S. military and continued U.S. military involvement in the Middle East and Afghanistan offer a compelling explanation as to why Cobra Gold has been scaled back slightly.<sup>290</sup> During the surge in Iraq and later Afghanistan, the priority for assignment of troops was targeted at units in the combat rotation. The military downsizing, or rightsizing, was a result of the U.S. government's plan to cut military spending and decrease the military personnel surge that was necessary for war rotations.<sup>291</sup> Although still important, military exercises became secondary to the war efforts. Pavin Chachavalpongpun, professor at Kyoto University, claims that the countries' intimate, long-standing, and mutually beneficial military relationship remains steadfast, allowing the United States leeway to publicly criticize Thailand's coups without threatening the alliance.<sup>292</sup> U.S. officials can safely express displeasure while sending gentle reminders that the administration has not forgotten about Thailand's political situation.

Additionally, alliance theory suggests that both the United States and Thailand would remain loyal to each other and to a large degree have. The U.S. administration

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<sup>289</sup> "U.S. Imposes Sanctions on Thailand," BBC News, September 28, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/5390284.stm>; Johannes Dragsbæk Schmidt, "The Military Coup and Its Implications for the Thai Economy," Aalborg University (2007), [www.vbn.aau.dk/files/13638939/The\\_Military\\_Coup\\_and\\_its\\_Implications\\_for\\_the\\_Thai\\_Economy.pdf](http://www.vbn.aau.dk/files/13638939/The_Military_Coup_and_its_Implications_for_the_Thai_Economy.pdf); "U.S. Reviewing Aid to Thailand," *Nation*, 22 September 2006, [www.nationmultimedia.com//US-reviewing-aid-to-Thailand-30014342.html](http://www.nationmultimedia.com//US-reviewing-aid-to-Thailand-30014342.html).

<sup>290</sup> Personal phone conversation with Marine Corps Officer Monitor, March 14, 2007, Okinawa, Japan.; "Active Duty Force Drawdown," U.S. Marine Corps, access 15 May 2016, [www.manpower.usmc.mil/webcenter/portal/MPP/Drawdown%20Information?\\_aftrLoop=630579481454642%20%40%40%3F\\_aftrLoop%3D630579481454642%26\\_adf.ctrl-state%3D605h1js5\\_38](http://www.manpower.usmc.mil/webcenter/portal/MPP/Drawdown%20Information?_aftrLoop=630579481454642%20%40%40%3F_aftrLoop%3D630579481454642%26_adf.ctrl-state%3D605h1js5_38).

<sup>291</sup> Benjamin H. Friedman and Christopher Preble, "A Plan to Cut Military Spending," Cato Institute (1 November 2010), [www.downsizinggovernment.org/defense/plan-cut-military-spending](http://www.downsizinggovernment.org/defense/plan-cut-military-spending); Christopher Preble, "Rightsizing U.S. Ground Forces," Cato Institute (1 November 2010), [www.downsizinggovernment.org/defense/plan-cut-military-spending](http://www.downsizinggovernment.org/defense/plan-cut-military-spending).

<sup>292</sup> Chachavalpongpun, "American Position vis-a-vis Thai Coup."

applied the minimum amount of pressure required by law and announced continuing areas of cooperation on a consistent basis. Then, U.S. officials appointed a career diplomat, Glynn Davies, to be the U.S. ambassador to Thailand, a development that signals strong commitment, and updated the Thailand-U.S. Defense Alliance, the United States' second security agreement with the Kingdom. At the U.S.-ASEAN Summit in California in 2016, President Obama announced a new initiative called U.S.-ASEAN Connect. The goal of this initiative is to strengthen U.S. economic engagement with ASEAN states.<sup>293</sup> The administration chose Bangkok to be one of three regional centers. Establishing a center in Thailand suggests that the U.S. government is less concerned about the political situation and more concerned about strengthening relations with its long-term ally.

### **C. DEMOCRATIZATION**

During the Cold War, the democratic United States struggled with the communist Soviet Union over geopolitical, ideological, and economic differences. For 45 years, each superpower attempted to spread its ideology globally. Now the world's sole superpower, the United States continues to advocate for democracy as a means to promote peace and stability around the world.<sup>294</sup> This foundational policy is based in part on democratic peace theory, which suggests that democratic governments tend to avoid going to war with other democracies, respect human rights, and prefer peaceful resolutions.<sup>295</sup> In practice, the United States encourages democracy in other countries to varying degrees and at different times, just as it has in Thailand.

In its simplest form, democracy means rule by the people; in turn, the government exists to protect its citizens and ensure civil and political liberties. Citizens help shape policies and law through free speech, freedom of assembly, and elected representatives and advocate through civil-society organizations. The most common system globally is a

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<sup>293</sup> "Fact Sheet U.S.-ASEAN Connect," ASEAN - United States Mission, 16 February 2016, [www.asean.usmission.gov/factsheet02172016.html](http://www.asean.usmission.gov/factsheet02172016.html).

<sup>294</sup> Susan B. Epstein, Nina M. Serafino, and Francis T. Miko, *Democracy Promotion: Cornerstone of U.S. Foreign Policy?* (CRS Report No. RL34296) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2007), 3, [www.fas.org/srgp/crs/row/RL34296.pdf](http://www.fas.org/srgp/crs/row/RL34296.pdf).

<sup>295</sup> Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy*, 12.

parliamentary democracy in which voters elect politicians to represent their interests in a legislative assembly from which the prime minister and cabinet members are selected. The assembly members then make decisions based on the majority vote and coalition building within their legislatures. Given that democracies encourage diversity of ideas, beliefs, and participation, their citizens often have conflicting agendas and, at times, even experience setbacks in terms of civil resolution of disputes.

Democracy promotion has been a key principle of U.S. foreign policy. Generally, democratization in its simplest definition is the process of a state's transition to democracy—a system that is less authoritarian, often takes time, and could experience setbacks. One of President George W. Bush's reasons for the Iraq War was to bring democracy to the people of Iraq. He stated that the United States was “committed to a strategic goal of a free Iraq that is democratic, that can govern itself, defend itself and sustain itself.”<sup>296</sup> The Bush administration reasoned that promoting democracy abroad ultimately benefits that state and U.S. national interest. The 2006 National Strategy for Combating Terrorism indicated democratization as a long-term solution to combating terrorism.<sup>297</sup>

In 2013, President Barack Obama reiterated the U.S. commitment in the Middle East by expressing continued support for a stable transition to democracy.<sup>298</sup> The 2015 National Security Strategy indicates that “defending democracy and human rights is related to every enduring national interest; . . . we know from our own history [that] people must lead their own struggles for freedom if those struggles are to succeed.”<sup>299</sup> Democratic institutions, weak in their infancy, can fail to perform their mandate, lowering citizens' confidence in democracy. Some states, such as Thailand, appear stuck in a perpetual coup cycle, alternating between authoritarianism and democratization.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> George W. Bush, “President Bush Meets with Senior U.S. Defense Officials on Iraq,” White House Office of the Press Secretary, 13 December 2006, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/12/20061213-5.html>.

<sup>297</sup> “National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, 2006,” *Council on Foreign Relations* (September 2006), [www.cfr.org/counterterrorism/national-strategy-combating-terrorism-2006/p11389](http://www.cfr.org/counterterrorism/national-strategy-combating-terrorism-2006/p11389).

<sup>298</sup> Barack Obama, “President Barack Obama's State of the Union Address,” *White House* (2013).

<sup>299</sup> Obama, “National Security Strategy,” (2015), 19.

<sup>300</sup> Kurlantzick, “Can Thailand Break Its Coup Addiction?”

According to a CRS report, “While some observers believe that spreading democracy is a key foreign policy priority, other argue that democracy promotion is but one of a number of U.S. strategic objectives and not necessarily the overriding one.”<sup>301</sup> Other factors should also be considered and prioritized. The current U.S. National Security Strategy asserts that our closest allies will be other democratic states, and the administration encourages Thailand to return to democracy. However, democratization takes time to develop and inculcate.

Thailand’s democratization process has been relatively slow and has experienced several setbacks. In the 1970s, Thai citizens challenged the military’s involvement in politics and, from 1976 to 1978, embarked on nascent democratization. Prime minister and former general Prem Tinsulanonda’s nondemocratic regime of the 1980s gradually introduced democratic reforms, with elections taking place in 1988 and 1990 before a coup on 23 February 1991 briefly ended Thailand’s democratic experiment. Expansion of education and robust economic growth in the Kingdom in the 1980s and 1990s contributed to a growing middle class that was better able to challenge the establishment.<sup>302</sup> Black May of 1992, a violent uprising against the military regime, appeared to end Thailand’s coup cycle. For almost 15 years, Thailand’s military refrained from becoming directly involved in politics, but the military seized control in 2006 and 2014, claiming to protect the monarchy.

Amidst domestic public criticism, the current Thai government, led by General Prayuth, is attempting to promote its legitimacy through improved economic, security, and political relations at home and abroad. Thai scholar Suchit Bunbongkarn observes that “any political regime which does not secure legitimacy will find it hard to survive since its legitimacy depends on its acceptance by its citizens as expressed through major political forces.”<sup>303</sup> After the 2006 and 2014 coups, the military regime insisted that its actions were necessary to remove Thaksin and his illiberal government to facilitate free

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<sup>301</sup> Epstein, Serafino, and Miko, “Democracy Promotion, 1.

<sup>302</sup> Farrelly, “Why Democracy Struggles,” 285–88.

<sup>303</sup> Suchit Bunbongkarn, “What Went Wrong with the Thai Democracy?,” *Southeast Asian Affairs* 2015, no. 1 (2015): 359.

and fair elections, rebuild democratic institutions, and contain corruption.<sup>304</sup> The Prayuth government claims to be navigating back to democracy, but based on the proposed constitution, which Thais will vote on in an August 7, 2016, referendum, Thailand will most likely be less of a Western-style democracy and more of a Thai-style democracy.<sup>305</sup>

Joshua Kurlantzick, a senior fellow for Southeast Asia at the Council on Foreign Relations describes Thai-style democracy as a system where multiple institutions represent elite interests and can overrule elected representatives; this system is characterized by relatively free elections and rule by elected officials, but the Thai establishment's power is preserved.<sup>306</sup> According to the U.S. Department of State, "Some observers have characterized provisions within the [draft] constitution, as well as laws that prohibit campaigning for or against the referendum, as undemocratic and designed to institutionalize the role of the military in Thai politics."<sup>307</sup> Prayuth insists that his government is acting transparently and in the best interests of the Kingdom, with a stable democracy as an eventual end-goal.<sup>308</sup> For Thailand, a hasty return to democracy followed by a failing democratic institution in Thailand could perpetuate the Kingdom's coup cycle.<sup>309</sup>

## **1. Economic**

In general, democratization theory suggests that a minimal level of economic prosperity, economic freedom, and rule of law with protection of property rights is

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<sup>304</sup> International Crisis Group, "Thailand's Lengthening Roadmap to elections," (10 December 2015), [www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/thailand/274-thailand-s-lengthening-roadmap-to-elections.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/thailand/274-thailand-s-lengthening-roadmap-to-elections.pdf).

<sup>305</sup> International Crisis Group, "A Coup Ordained?," 3; Joshua Kurlantzick, "Is There Such Thing as a Thai-Style Democracy?," *Council on Foreign Relations* (8 April 2015), [www.blogs.cfr.org/asia/2015/04/08/is-there-such-thing-as-a-thai-style-democracy/](http://www.blogs.cfr.org/asia/2015/04/08/is-there-such-thing-as-a-thai-style-democracy/); Surin Maisirikrod, "Learning from the 19 September Coup: Advancing Thai-Style Democracy?," *Southeast Asian Affairs* 2007, no. 1 (2007): 340–59; "Uniform Reaction: The General Introduce 'True Democracy,' Thai-Style," (2014); Federico Ferrara, *Thailand Unhinged: Unraveling the Myth of a Thai-Style Democracy* (Jakarta, Indonesia: Equinox, 2010), 9.

<sup>306</sup> Kurlantzick, "Is There Such Thing as a Thai-Style Democracy?"

<sup>307</sup> "Thai Referendum Paves the Way to Future Elections," U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Diplomatic Security. April 29, 2016, [www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=19581](http://www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=19581).

<sup>308</sup> International Crisis Group, "A Coup Ordained?," 22.

<sup>309</sup> Kurlantzick, "Can Thailand Break Its Coup Addiction?"

needed for democracy to take hold.<sup>310</sup> Historically, liberal democracies have tended to be associated most with economic prosperity, with the exception of the current communist regime in China, among others. Several elements of democracy appear compatible with economic growth. For instance, freedom of expression and competition can promote innovation. Freedoms of assembly, association, and the press can encourage business collaborations and flexibility. Rule of law, transparency, and accountability help to combat corruption.<sup>311</sup> These factors, in turn, are valued by investors who bring fresh capital that contributes to economic development.<sup>312</sup> The overlap between elements conducive to democratization and economic prosperity has helped certain developments in U.S.-Thailand economic relations, but not others, since 2006.

Democratization theory predicts that the United States and Thailand would have resumed FTA negotiations after Thailand returned to democratically elected rule in 2008, yet they did not. Instead, the Obama administration placed greater emphasis on multilateral economic and political agreements that included Thailand.<sup>313</sup> First, the United States appointed an ambassador to ASEAN in 2008. Then, in 2009, the United States signed the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and in 2010, it established a permanent mission to ASEAN, thus creating a formal, multinational economic partnership with the region.<sup>314</sup> In 2016, President Obama showed continuing economic commitment to the region when he announced the U.S.-ASEAN Connect initiative.<sup>315</sup> Thus, although a bilateral FTA did not materialize, the United States now has a TIFA with ASEAN as a whole, which includes Thailand.<sup>316</sup> Even in the absence of a formal

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<sup>310</sup> Sunde and Cervellati, "Democratizing for Peace?," 774.

<sup>311</sup> Transparency International, "Transparency International - Country Profile Thailand," [www.transparency.org/country/#THA\\_DataResearch](http://www.transparency.org/country/#THA_DataResearch); Augusto Lopez-Claros, "Six Strategies to Fight Corruption," World Bank, 14 May 2014, [www.blogs.worldbank.org/futuredevelopment/six-strategies-fight-corruption](http://www.blogs.worldbank.org/futuredevelopment/six-strategies-fight-corruption).

<sup>312</sup> Claude B. Erb, Campbell R. Harvey, and Tadas E. Viskanta, "Political Risk, Economic Risk, and Financial Risk," <http://dx.doi.org/10.2469/faj.v52.n6.2038> (19 December 2005).

<sup>313</sup> Benny Teh Cheng Guan, "U.S. Revives Asia Trade Agenda," *Asia Times Online*, January 13, 2010., [www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/LA13Ae01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/LA13Ae01.html).

<sup>314</sup> "ASEAN Countries Are Increasingly Important Diplomatic, Economic, and Security Partners for the U.S.," U.S.-ASEAN Business Council, 12 August 2014, [www.usasean.org/why-asean/trade-and-investment](http://www.usasean.org/why-asean/trade-and-investment).

<sup>315</sup> "Fact Sheet U.S.-ASEAN Connect."

<sup>316</sup> Lohman, "Reinvigorating the U.S.-Thailand Alliance," 5.

bilateral trade agreement, U.S.-Thai two-way trade has continued on a steady upward trend for the past two decades.<sup>317</sup>

Thailand's economy and political institutions are both in transition phases, with the United States playing a consistent yet moderate role in each. Prayuth's regime is attempting to establish legitimacy by allowing some democratic principles to remain and by improving the Kingdom's economy. Thailand's desire to sustain and deepen economic prosperity was evident in its policy shift toward the high-technology industry to promote innovation and its outreach to new partners for increased trade. This policy shift refers to changes that Thailand has put into practice since the 2014 coup, specifically the rule of law, which fosters stability and encourages FDI. In 2015, Thai and Russian officials signed 10 agreements, taking positive steps toward improving bilateral trade.<sup>318</sup> In 2016, the Prayuth government even set aside nationalist competition with Cambodia over the Preah Vihear (*Phra Viharn* in Thai) temple dispute in favor of economic cooperation between the two neighbors.<sup>319</sup> Recent estimates by the World Bank and IMF predict Thailand's GDP growth to increase to 3 percent in 2016.<sup>320</sup>

## **2. Security**

Democratization theory and democratic peace theory suggest that advocates for democracy, including or perhaps particularly the United States, would have exerted great pressure on the Thai military government after the 2006 and 2014 coups to return to democracy and to not significantly limit civil political freedoms. A military coup is considered a serious step back from democracy, and the United States—if democratization was its primary objective—could have sent a stronger message to express its disapproval by canceling Cobra Gold and restricting Thailand's access to IMET and FMS funds, but it did not. In the short term, the U.S. government appears to

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<sup>317</sup> Simones, "Trade Balance of Thailand to the United States."

<sup>318</sup> Rkhimbabaev, "The Road Ahead for Thai-Russian Trade Relations."

<sup>319</sup> Greg Raymond, "Economic Imperatives Warm Thai-Cambodian Ties," *East Asia Forum* (27 January 2016), [www.eastasiaforum.org/2016/01/27/economic-imperatives-warm-thai-cambodian-ties/](http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2016/01/27/economic-imperatives-warm-thai-cambodian-ties/).

<sup>320</sup> Boris Sullivan, "IMF Foresees Thai GDP Growth at 3% in 2016," 29 March 2016, [www.thailand-business-news.com/economics/53014-imf-foresees-thai-gdp-growth-3-2016.html](http://www.thailand-business-news.com/economics/53014-imf-foresees-thai-gdp-growth-3-2016.html); John LeFevre, "Thailand Weakest ASEAN Economy in 2016—World Bank," AEC News Today, 7 January 2016, <http://aecnewstoday.com/2016/thailand-weakest-asean-economy-in-2016-world-bank/>.



have to set aside its democratization agenda in favor of maintaining stable relations with Thailand.

In the case of security cooperation, the previously discussed balance of power theory appears more applicable than the democratization objectives. Joshua Kurlantzick claims that the Prayuth government is playing China off the United States.<sup>321</sup> The regime has outlined a roadmap back to democracy, but implementing that timeline has been delayed until 2017. Nevertheless, the U.S. government remains committed to its security cooperation with Thailand.

By scaling back Cobra Gold, the U.S. government could have communicated its disapproval of the Thai junta quite publicly and, in turn, reinforced the importance of democratic norms and good governance.<sup>322</sup> Yet, canceling the exercise would not only remove a vital opportunity to practice interoperability and coordination among regional states for future humanitarian assistance but also likely decrease U.S. influence with more states than just Thailand. Instead, by continuing Cobra Gold, Washington maintains a long-standing exercise that is at the heart of its regional engagement.

After the 2006 and 2014 coups, the United States was legally mandated by Congress to suspend IMET funding, but the Pentagon and the State Department considered the program too vital to facilitating security cooperation and promoting democracy abroad.<sup>323</sup> IMET is a means to professionalize foreign militaries and to expose international military officers to the United States and its values.<sup>324</sup> U.S. values and ideals go hand in hand with military training, and IMET is a nonintrusive way to promote U.S. ideology. By training future leaders and exposing them to democratic values and human rights standards, IMET aligns with U.S. national security interests and democratization objectives. According to RAND, U.S. influence on Thailand's military is

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<sup>321</sup> Joshua Kurlantzick, "Thai Junta Using China to Leverage the West," *Council on Foreign Relations*, 8 July 2014, [www.cfr.org/thailand/thai-junta-using-china-leverage-west/p33355](http://www.cfr.org/thailand/thai-junta-using-china-leverage-west/p33355).

<sup>322</sup> Poling, "The Case for Holding Cobra Gold 2015 in Thailand."

<sup>323</sup> Taw, "Thailand and the Philippines"; "International Military Education and Training (IMET)," Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 15 May 2016, [www.dsca.mil/programs/international-military-education-training-imet](http://www.dsca.mil/programs/international-military-education-training-imet); "International Military Education and Training Account Summary," U.S. Department of State, 16 February 2016, [www.state.gov/t/pm/ppa/sat/c14562.htm](http://www.state.gov/t/pm/ppa/sat/c14562.htm).

<sup>324</sup> Taw, "Thailand and the Philippines," 31.

amplified by three factors: IMET-trained Thai officers become trainers, Thai military training schools adopt U.S. doctrine and training manuals, and IMET alumni become future military leaders.<sup>325</sup> By suspending IMET funding, the U.S. government weakened its democratizing influence, but by allowing Thailand to pay to send its students to the United States, it preserved its democratic influence on future Thai leaders.

### **3. Diplomatic**

If promoting and supporting democratization was the United States' top priority in Southeast Asia, the U.S. government would likely have more strongly condemned Thailand's two latest coups and exerted greater diplomatic pressure on the subsequent military governments. Some members of Congress argued that certain privileges that accompany major non-NATO ally status should be reserved for democracies and suggested revoking Thailand's status following the 2006 and 2014 coups.<sup>326</sup> Congress even introduced the Thailand Democracy Act, which proposed removing Thailand's preferred status.<sup>327</sup> Still, neither President Bush nor President Obama took action on the proposal. As a result, Thailand continued to have access to U.S. weapons and training. Pavin Chachavalpongpun accuses the United States of "being more concerned with protecting its own short-term strategic interest [in the region] than with promoting democracy."<sup>328</sup>

In regard to its democratization, Thailand's future remains unclear and will depend on several developments. First, the current government believes it must finalize a new constitution before the next general election can take place. Opponents of the current administration question how democratic this constitution will be, given that the first draft sought to appoint several active and retired military members to key political

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 24–27.

<sup>326</sup> House of Representatives, Impact of Coup-Related Sanctions, 19.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>328</sup> Pavin Chachavalpongpun, "The Dilemma Confronting the U.S.-Thailand Relationship," *National Bureau of Asian Research*, 20 April 2016, [www.nbr.org/publications/element.aspx?id=896](http://www.nbr.org/publications/element.aspx?id=896).

positions.<sup>329</sup> To Thailand's credit, the International Crisis Group reports that the proposed charter insists on a "democratic system of government with the King as Head of State."<sup>330</sup> The interim government admits that its actions were undemocratic, but it also claims that they were necessary for stability and promises future progress.<sup>331</sup> The next constitution will attempt to limit the consolidation of power and establish greater checks and balances to protect against a pro-Thaksin party.

Second, the royal succession, which has been a taboo subject within the Kingdom, will play a significant part in the future of Thailand's political landscape. Pavin Chachavalpongpun doubts the current military government will relinquish authority until a royal succession takes place.<sup>332</sup> Whoever succeeds revered King Bhumibol Adulyadej will need to establish more than traditional legitimacy if he or she is to play a constructive role in reuniting a country that is deeply divided. While U.S. officials disapprove of Thailand's coups and encourage a rapid and complete return to democracy, Thai leaders do not want external interference that threatens its sovereignty.

For the United States, its democratic rhetoric appears less convincing than its actions. In 2014, Ambassador Kristie Kenney expressed concerns about the human rights implications of the coup and threatened to limit military engagement.<sup>333</sup> Since, there have been very few official statements criticizing Thailand's use of lese-majesty laws and other legal mechanisms to jail political opponents. In 2016, U.S. ambassador Glyn Davies stated, "As deep and broad as our partnership is today, it will grow stronger still when, as the prime minister has affirmed, Thailand returns to elected governance. With a strengthened, sustainable democratic system, Thailand's regional leadership role, and our alliance, can reach its full potential."<sup>334</sup> With this statement, Ambassador Davies

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<sup>329</sup> Pavin Chachavalpongpun, "Diplomacy under Siege: Thailand's Political Crisis and the Impact on Foreign Policy," *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 31, no. 3 (2009): 447–67; "Draft Charter Only Prolongs Junta Power: New Democracy Movement," Prachatai English, May 16, 2016, <http://prachatai.org/english/node/6166>.

<sup>330</sup> International Crisis Group, "A Coup Ordained?," 21.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 16–17.

<sup>332</sup> Chachavalpongpun, "The Dilemma Confronting the U.S.-Thailand Relationship."

<sup>333</sup> Pavin Chachavalpongpun "Democratic Rhetoric," PrachataiEnglish, February 13, 2016, <http://prachatai.org/english/node/5856>.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

suggests that the United States agrees with the Thai military that halting democracy was necessary to rebuild it. Moreover, the United States continues to have high-level diplomatic engagement with Thailand—such as at the 2016 U.S.-ASEAN summit in California, and military engagement, such as Cobra Gold— further demonstrating that the United States is unwilling to exert pressure for the sake of democracy.

#### **D. CHAPTER CONCLUSION**

The U.S. responses to Thailand's coups appeared relatively subdued, but a deeper examination suggests that U.S. officials were calculated and methodical. American leaders considered increasing challenges in Asia by other large powers, signaled their commitment to a long-term ally, and upheld national principles that include supporting democratization abroad. U.S.-Thailand relations were examined in the realms of economy, security, and diplomacy using three theories. This examination showed that balance of power theory offers the most logical explanation for muted U.S. actions after each coup. Strengthening Sino-Thailand relations challenged U.S. influence in the region, so the United States took moderate steps that would not alienate its long-term ally. China increased both economic and security cooperation with Thailand while refraining from condemning Thailand's coups. These developments upset the balance of power, compelling U.S. officials to take certain actions to maintain the balance in their favor. Alliance theory also helps explain the U.S. security commitment and its diplomatic relations with Thailand, but it fails to explain why the FTA negotiations remained motionless. Finally, although democratization is a central guiding principle for the United States, the Bush and Obama administrations were only willing to make soft democratic pushes. The counterfactual to democratization theory suggests that U.S. officials are purposely waiting for Thailand to develop its own Thai-style democracy without U.S. influence, thinking that homegrown systems may be more resilient in the long run or calculating that the United States will have more opportunities to influence democratic consolidation in Thailand if it maintains stable ties.

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## V. CONCLUSION

How have Thailand's two most recent coups d'état in 2006 and 2014 affected U.S.-Thai relations? Why has the United States not exerted more pressure on its long-term ally—which has been one of only a few countries to democratize in Southeast Asia—to return to democracy? The United States ostensibly sidelined its advocacy for democracy, which has long been and continues to be a key platform of U.S. foreign policy, by responding to the coups d'état with only slightly reduced security-related activity, continued economic engagement, and mild diplomatic action. These measured steps judiciously sought to maintain the U.S. alliance with Thailand and preserve the United States' hegemonic influence in the region. In response to the suspension of some types of U.S. military aid, Thai leaders did not hesitate to show the United States that they had other options. As a middle-power state, Thailand tilted the balance just enough to concern U.S. officials at a time when the United States sought to rebalance to Asia.

Testing theories against real-world events helps validate theoretical claims. Applying three broad theoretical frameworks—balance of power, alliance theory, and democratization—to the U.S.-Thailand relationship exposed factors that influenced the behavior of both states. First, this thesis analyzed the bilateral economic, security, and diplomatic conditions that existed before and after the 2006 and 2014 coups. Then, the areas that shifted were evaluated in light of balance of power, alliance, and democratization theories. Balance of power theory provided the most compelling explanation for the mild U.S. responses to both the 2006 and 2014 coups. Additionally, security cooperation appeared to be highly valued by leaders of both countries. Although democratization of a key ally was important to the United States, it was overshadowed by a perceived emerging security threat in the region. The United States behaved as if it were concerned about losing influence with Thailand to China, primarily in the security realm and secondarily in both economic and diplomatic relations.

Thailand's coups triggered a congressionally mandated U.S. response within the United States predicated on the established foreign policy of promoting democratization abroad, but the U.S. administration tempered this requirement. According to U.S. foreign

policy, when a foreign country removes a democratically elected leader, Congress mandates the immediate suspension of military assistance to that state. Following Thailand's 2006 and 2014 coups, members of Congress proposed to rescind Thailand's major non-NATO ally status, but both the Bush and Obama administrations overruled these proposals. There also were calls to cancel or significantly scale back the annual Cobra Gold military exercises led by Thailand and the United States. Yet, these exercises went on, with the slightly reduced participation of the U.S. military best explained by the more pressing need for military personnel in Afghanistan, Iraq, and South Korea. The U.S. executive branch made calculated decisions to remain faithful to its long-term ally, and Congress seemed to accept that maintaining a strong alliance was in the United States' best interest.

The United States' soft push for a return to democracy came as a surprise. Within the region, Thailand and the Philippines are the only two states with relatively long histories of democratization. On mainland Southeast Asia, Thailand has been the only surely democratizing state. With the administration's impetus to promote democracy abroad as evidenced in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States could not ignore Thailand's democratic setback. U.S. officials publicly condemned the coups and encouraged Thailand's military regime to restore democracy. However, U.S. officials worked to demonstrate their long-term commitment to Thailand and the region. The United States relaxed its push for democracy and, to a large degree, maintained bilateral economic, security, and diplomatic cooperation at pre-coup levels.

While the United States applied some pressure on Thailand following each coup, Thai leaders explored other alternatives to the United States. Unilaterally, Thailand can defend its own sovereignty, but historically it has predominately relied on alliances and diplomacy to fend off colonialism and communism. The U.S.-Thailand alliance has been central to Thailand's defense since the Cold War, and bilateral trade and U.S. FDI in Thailand have been robust. Despite this, following suspensions of U.S. military aid after each coup, Thailand assertively pursued its economic, security, and diplomatic options with China, Russia, and ASEAN as secondary partners to communicate to the United States that it was not Thailand's only option. China and Russia took advantage of the

situation and provided Thailand with alternatives to the status quo relationship with the United States by offering arms sales and, in the case of China, bilateral military exercises. A multilateral approach with ASEAN could work economically for Thailand, especially since the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015. However, ASEAN is not a true alliance in that it lacks significant security cooperation. Thailand's most effective option appears to be playing larger powers against one another, which it can do given its status as a strategically important middle power. Thailand has a history of playing states off each other, and the current regime appears to follow the same path.

The United States is well aware that China and Russia have aggressively pursued enhanced security and economic relations with Thailand since the two recent coups. When the U.S. government suspended \$29 million in military aid to Thailand following the 2006 coup, China stepped in and provided a \$49 million security package.<sup>335</sup> Currently, China continues to assist Thailand with military aid, weapons and equipment sales, military student exchanges, and bilateral exercises.<sup>336</sup> More recently, Thai leaders engaged with Russia, another great power, to show that they have other options.<sup>337</sup> Although the United States remains the preferred security partner, Thai leaders are negotiating with both China and Russia for submarines, helicopters, and tanks. The United States identifies both China and Russia as strategic competitors, but Thailand appears to see them as reliable security and economic partners that do not interfere with Thailand's internal matters. Anthony Davis, a security analyst for *HIS-Jane's*, reported that Thailand's foreign policy appears to be redirecting away from the West and closer to China and Russia, both of which are challenging the hegemonic power of the United States.<sup>338</sup> Thailand's warming relations with other large powers have upset the balance of

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<sup>335</sup> Ehrlich, "China Muscling U.S. Aside in Thailand"; Chanlett-Avery, *Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations* (CRS Report No. RL32593) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008), 14–15, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32593.pdf>.

<sup>336</sup> Ehrlich, "China Muscling U.S. Aside in Thailand"; Ehrlich, "Thailand Nears \$1 Billion Submarine Deal"; Ehrlich, "U.S. Sees China and Thailand Strengthen Military Relations"; Ehrlich, "China-Thailand Joint Military Exercise."

<sup>337</sup> Belford, "Junta-Ruled Thailand Flirts with Russia"; Wong-Anan and Nanuam, "Regime Seeks Russia's Backing"; Nanuam, "Russia Offers to Build Armaments Plant in Thailand."

<sup>338</sup> Wong-Anan and Nanuam, "Regime Seeks Russia's Backing."



power, explaining in large part why the United States did not exert greater pressure on Thailand to return to democracy.

While the current Thai regime is attempting to secure its legitimacy at home and abroad, it is also confronted with a less secure alliance with the United States. After Thailand's 2014 coup, the U.S.-Thailand relationship appeared to cool off after public criticism from U.S. officials and the subsequent suspension of military aid. Pavin Chachavalpongpun claims that both the United States and China are competing for strategic ties with Thailand.<sup>339</sup> Thus far, Thailand has a relatively solid relationship with both countries. However, a closer Sino-Thailand relationship poses a significant dilemma for the United States in its strategy to rebalance to Asia. The U.S. ability to rely on Thailand has been compromised by the country's political turmoil. Thai leaders have appeared distracted by domestic turmoil over the past decade and less able to assist with the U.S. rebalance strategy. Despite U.S.-Thailand tensions, it appears that the most favorable option for both countries is to continue their alliance, but for the United States, maintaining the balance of power is also important.

Overall, the bilateral relationship appears to be on an upward trajectory and should be expected to remain favorable, but the United States should not overestimate its own worth or underestimate Thailand's resolve. The 183-year friendship appears durable and can be expected to endure well into the future, but it should not be taken for granted, especially when Thailand is willing to dance with other partners. Thailand demonstrated that it is willing to explore security and economic cooperation with other larger powers, especially with U.S. competitors. While the U.S. responses to both coups were virtually the same, Thailand's balancing behavior should also be expected to continue, especially if U.S. foreign policy continues to mandate a suspension of military aid. The U.S. government has demonstrated that it is willing to cultivate bilateral relationships even with nondemocratic governments, most recently with Vietnam to increase security cooperation against regional maritime disputes involving China.<sup>340</sup> In short, security

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<sup>339</sup> Chachavalpongpun, "Competing Diplomacies."

<sup>340</sup> "Fact Sheet: United States-Vietnam Relations," White House Office of the Press Secretary, 23 May 2016, [www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/05/23/fact-sheet-united-states-vietnam-relations](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/05/23/fact-sheet-united-states-vietnam-relations).

concerns—especially those related to balance of power—appear to trump other factors in the U.S.-Thailand partnership, even pushing to the wayside the long-held, ideological desire of the United States to promote democracy abroad.

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